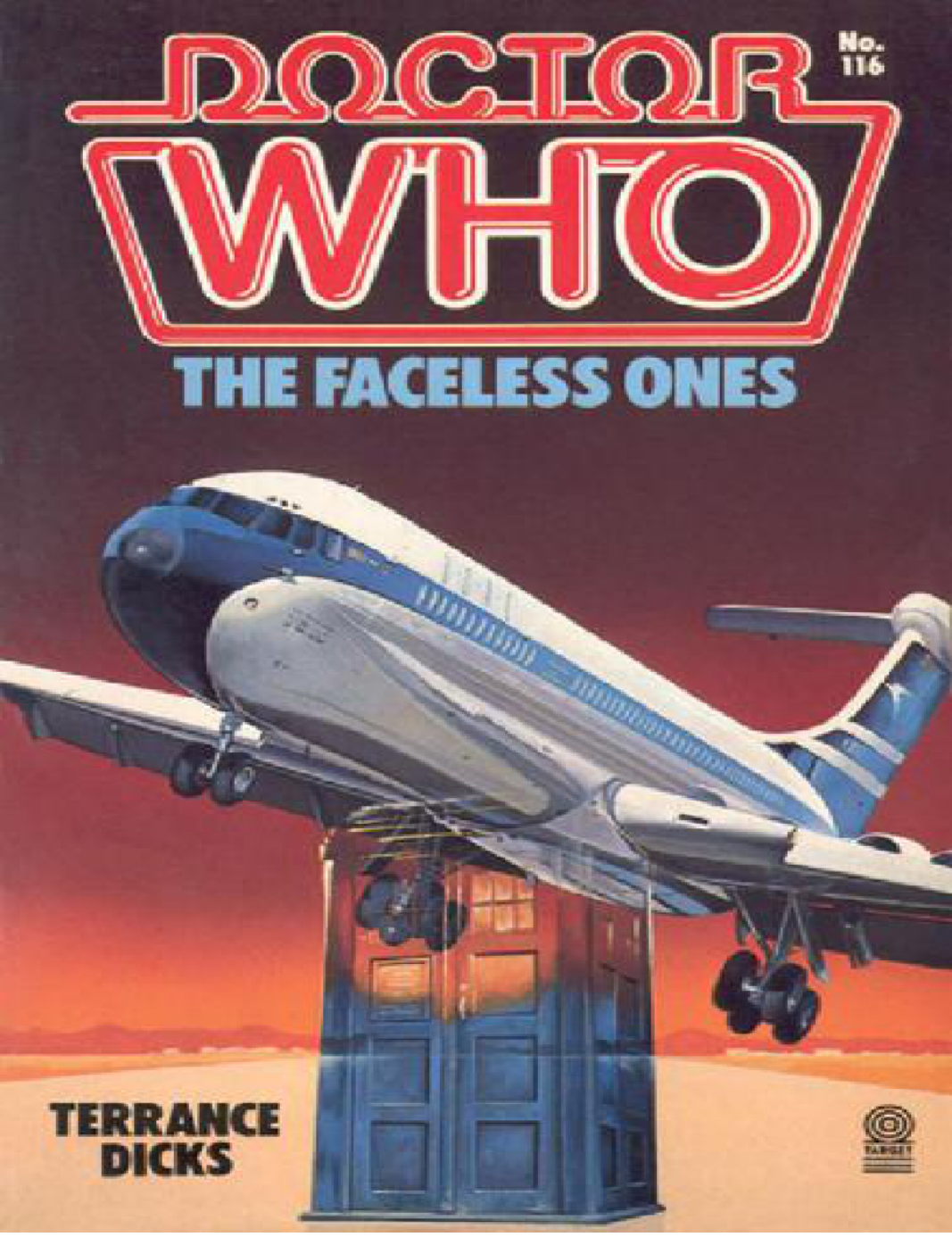
DOCTOR WHO

No. 116

THE FACELESS ONES



TERRANCE DICKS

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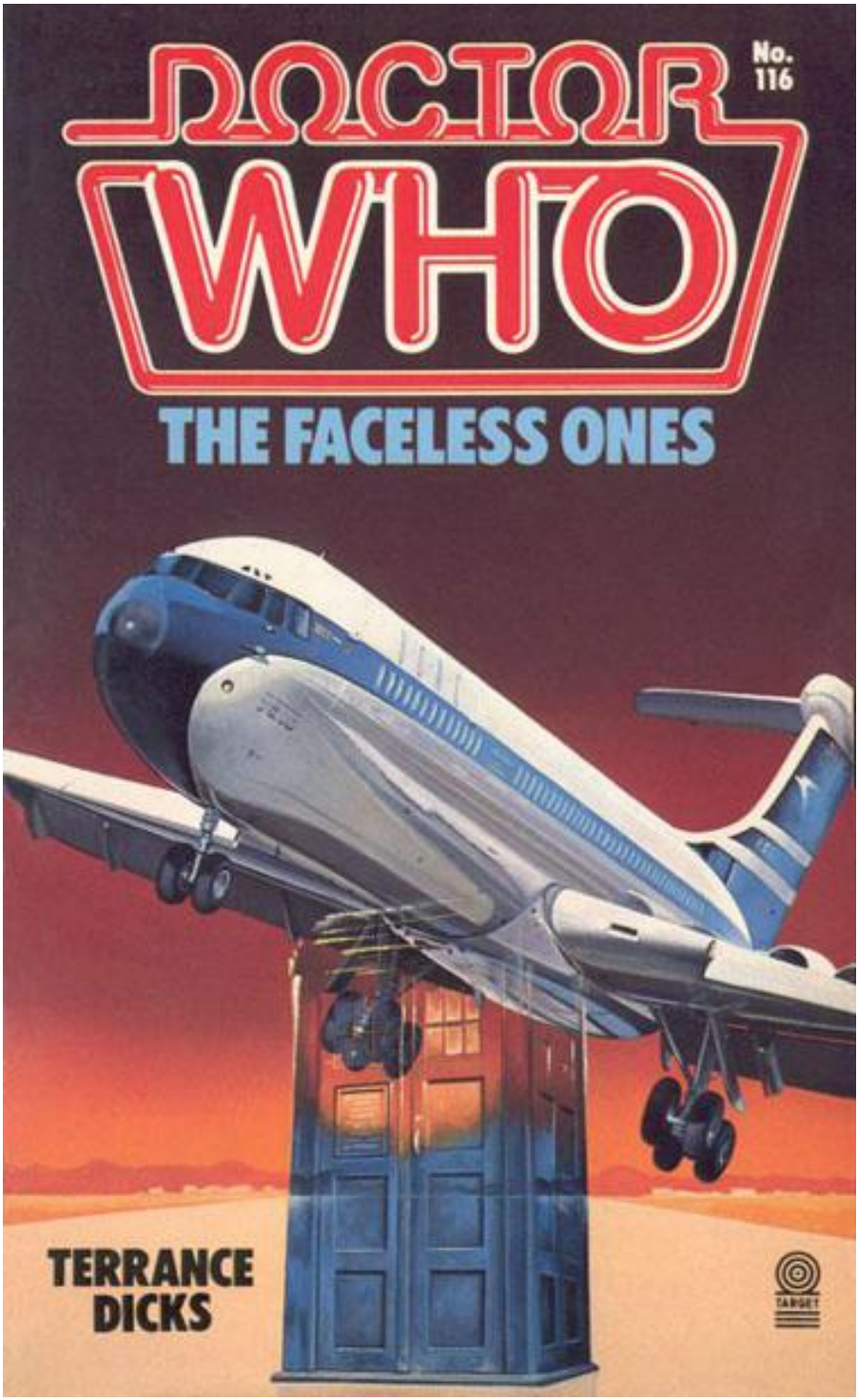

In the summer of 1966, thousands of young people are taking their holidays with Chameleon Tours. And not one of them is coming back.

When the TARDIS lands at Gatwick Airport the Doctor is drawn into a web of intrigue and deception. To add to his troubles, Polly mysteriously vanishes.

Or does she? The girl at the Chameleon Tours desk looks like Polly, and even sounds like her, but she claims she comes from Zurich.

Who is she really? Who is behind these abductions? And for what sinister purpose?

Soon the Doctor and Jamie must face

a desperate group of faceless aliens—the deadly Chameleons . . .

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DOCTOR WHO

THE FACELESS ONES

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TERRANCE DICKS

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1

Obstruction On Runway Five

The jet airliner screamed down out of the sky.

The captain, tense at the controls – *all* landings are tricky until you're actually on the ground – checked the rows of instrument dials in front of him, glanced automatically at the clear runway unrolling ahead – and then suddenly froze in horror.

The runway wasn't clear any longer. Sitting there, impossibly, at precisely the point where the wheels should touch ground was a

square blue shape with a flashing light on top. A police box...

For a fraction of a second longer the pilot stared unbelievingly at it. Then, instincts and training taking over, he pulled the nose of the great plane skywards again, clearing the obstruction, and the heads of those emerging from it by what felt like a matter of inches...

The brawny young man in kilt and roll-necked sweater ducked down instinctively as the huge shape roared overhead. 'Look out, Doctor, it's a flying beastie!' he cried.

Beside him, a rather disreputable-looking figure in baggy checked trousers and shabby frock-coat as staring skywards with an expression of eager interest. 'Nonsense, Jamie,' he began – and broke off as two young people came out of the police box to join them.

The first was a tough-looking young man in jeans and a check shirt. The second was a far more striking figure: a very pretty girl with long blonde hair. She wore a very long jacket and a very short skirt in some light-coloured material, the outfit completed by high white boots.

The young man was a cockney sailor called Ben, and the girl's name was Polly. Some time ago they had been caught up in the adventures of that mysterious traveller in time and space known only as the Doctor, who had carried them off in the TARDIS to a variety of terrifying adventures.

On one of them, a visit to Scotland at the time of the Jacobite rebellion of 1746, they had been joined by the young Highlander James Robert McCrimmon, Jamie for short.

Oddly enough, it was Jamie, the most primitive of them all, who had adjusted best to life with the Doctor. Coming as he did from a time when battle, murder and sudden death were the common events of everyday life, Jamie took in his stride the dangerous events which seemed to follow the Doctor – just as he did alien planets, spaceships and assorted monsters. To Jamie the Doctor was an interesting sort of mad magician, so it was only natural that monsters and marvels should surround him.

Polly and Ben however felt differently. Before that terrifying business of the War Machines, Polly had led a relatively quiet life as a scientist's secretary; now she was yearning for a return to that life. Ben, a merchant seaman, was worrying about the fact that he was late joining his ship – as far as he could work out, several hundred, or perhaps even thousand, years late.

Both had been pestering the Doctor for some time to get them back to their own place and time and finally the Doctor had obliged – after a fashion.

Inevitably, being the Doctor, he had landed them in the midst of danger. In fact, although they didn't realise it, the danger was far greater than their present unfortunate position, in the middle of a busy aircraft runway.

Polly and Ben looked round, took in their situation, and turned indignantly to the Doctor. But before they could shower him with reproaches, two things happened more or less at once.

First, another jet screamed overhead causing them to duck down instinctively.

Second, a very large and very angry policeman appeared on the edge of the runway.

The Doctor fell back on one of his favourite pieces of advice. 'Run!' he yelled. 'Scatter!'

They scattered, the policeman lumbering after them.

Charles Gordon was the Manager of the Airport. He wore a dark blue suit, a white shirt and a neatly-knotted striped tie, severe horn-rimmed glasses and a precisely trimmed little moustache.

Like his outward appearance, Gordon was neat, tidy and meticulous. He liked things done in the right way and at precisely the right time.

His nickname amongst his subordinates was the Commandant, and if some of them believed he would have been better suited to a career in the Gestapo, they were careful not to suggest it within his hearing.

Although he didn't realise it, Charles Gordon was about to encounter the most subversive and anarchic figure of his entire career, in the shape of a shabbily dressed little man known as the Doctor.

At this particular moment, Gordon was standing in the middle of the busy Air Traffic Control room. He had been summoned there because of an emergency – the Commandant hated emergencies. A plane had failed to land on schedule, and the commandant was listening with an expression of icy disbelief to one of his subordinates, a traffic controller called Meadows. 'The pilot said *what*?' he asked incredulously.

‘A police box on the runway,’ repeated Meadows desperately.

‘A likely story. Tell him to get back in the stack and await further instructions.’

‘Yes sir.’ Thankfully Meadows went back to his control console and spoke into a microphone. ‘Gatwick Airport to Sugar Delta Y-Ray. Return to your previous position in the stack and wait further instructions...’

The Commandant frowned. Already a number of planes were ‘stacked’ up above the airport in a holding pattern.

This meant discontented passengers and disrupted schedules, and, with more planes arriving all the time, a very real danger until the problem was sorted out.

He marched over to the big desk in the corner of the control room. His secretary, Jean Rock, was already dialling a number. She was an attractive, sensible-looking young woman with short fair hair. In her dark coat and skirt and crisp white-collared blouse she looked as business-like as the manager himself.

She had been working with the Commandant for some time now and knew his mind pretty well. So when he snapped, ‘Airport Police, Miss Rock!’ she simply handed him the receiver.

‘On the line now, sir,’ she said.

‘Airport Police? Manager here. Inbound aircraft reports an obstruction on Runway Five, just by the intersection with Two. Investigate, remove and report back!’

‘Jamie, over here,’ hissed the Doctor. He was hiding behind one of the enormous wheels of a grounded airliner.

Jamie ran to join him.

The Doctor looked round. The others were nowhere to be seen. Luckily the policeman had chosen to follow Ben when they all split up – luckily because Ben was probably the best runner of them all and he had led the pursuing policeman clean out of sight.

However there were lots more policemen in sight now, zooming about the airport perimeter on motor-bikes, patrolling the scattering of airport buildings on foot. The Doctor looked round. They were in one

of the obscurer parts of the airport he decided, well away from the main passenger area. There were little sheds and hangers straggling along the edges of the runways and most of the planes on the ground were small air-freighters or even smaller private planes.

The Doctor sighed, resigned to the fact that he seemed to be in trouble again. Although he didn't know it, for one of their party there was far more serious trouble on the way...

As a policeman turned the corner of the building, Polly ducked through the nearest open doorway and found herself in the shadowy gloom of what looked like a little hangar that had been converted to a combined store-room and office. Shelves lined the walls, filled with a mixed clutter of papers, files, cans of oil and aircraft spare parts.

There were crates scattered about the floor, and Polly ducked behind one of the largest as she heard footsteps and voices coming towards her.

Peering round the edge of the crate, she saw an angry-looking young man in a light grey suit striding determinedly towards the door by which she entered. He was clutching a large buff envelope as if it was something very important to him. Hurrying in pursuit was a dark, rather sinister-looking man. He had a gloomy and almost haunted fare and he wore the dark blue uniform of an airline pilot. 'Just a minute,' he called sharply.

The grey-suited man paused and turned.

'Give me that envelope!' demanded the pilot.

Ignoring him, the man started moving towards the door.

His pursuer called after him, 'I should advise you to stop!' He drew some kind of pistol from his pocket. The grey-suited man turned again, saw the weapon and turned to run for the door. Instantly the pilot fired. Light seemed to flash from the gun and the man with the envelope spun round, clutching at his neck. He screamed once, horribly, and then fell to the ground.

Snatching the envelope from the fallen man's clutch, the pilot took a blanket from a nearby shelf, tossed it carelessly over the body, then turned and mounted a couple of steps that led to a raised, enclosed inner area at the rear of the hangar.

The small room was a tiny cluttered office holding little more than a

table a chair and a telephone. On the rear wall rows of shelves held maps, charts and flight manuals all jumbled together.

The pilot went over to the wall, touched a hidden control and the entire wall slid back revealing a kind of mini-control room beyond, its wall crammed with instrument consoles and monitor screens.

The pilot went inside and the door closed behind him.

Once inside, he leaned forward and operated controls.

One of the monitor screens came to life showing a head and shoulders view of a fair-haired man with a broad, somehow cat-like face and hooded eyes.

'Blade!' said the man at the console urgently. 'Come quickly. Trouble.'

'Trouble, Spencer?' said the man on the screen. There was a sort of languid arrogance in his voice.

'Someone found the postcards,' Spencer explained.

'I see. Very well, I'll come at once.'

The screen went dark. The man in the control room turned his attention to another monitor which seemed to have switched on automatically. This one showed Polly, kneeling by the body, examining it...

As Spencer came clattering down the steps Polly heard him coming, straightened up, and sprinted through the open door. Spencer hurried after her. From the doorway he saw her running frantically across the tarmac.

Making no attempt to give chase, Spencer drew the compact little weapon from his pocket and took careful aim. With her light clothing and shining blonde hair the girl made an easy target, outlined against the blackness of the tarmac.

Just as he was about to fire, a motorcycle policeman zoomed into view. Hurriedly pocketing the weapon, Spencer turned and hurried back into the hangar.

Ben had indeed eluded his pursuer, and was lurking behind one of the airport out-buildings wondering what to do next. Find the Doctor, he supposed.

Suddenly a lorry drove past, and Ben's eyes widened in dismay. Perched on the back of the lorry, which was escorted by motorcycle police, was the TARDIS. Ben looked on helplessly as the TARDIS disappeared into the distance.

'Dumped it by number four hangar, have they?' grunted the Commandant. 'And it *was* a police box, you say?'

Slamming down the phone, he snapped, 'Jean, get me Superintendent Reynolds.'

Jean picked up the phone and began dialling. 'Do you think it was some sort of practical joke, sir? Students or something?'

'Whoever it was they'll pay for it. I will not have the lives of my passengers endangered by practical jokers.'

Jean was talking into the phone. 'Superintendent Reynolds? I have the Manager for you.'

The Commandant took the receiver. 'I want a full explanation of this police box of yours being left on my runway.

He broke off at the sound of the angry voice on the other end of the line. For once the Commandant was dealing with a personality as fully forceful as his own.

'I see,' he said after a moment. Then, determined to have the last word: 'Well, I want *all* security round here tightened up!'

He turned to Jean Rock and said a little sheepishly,

'Seems he already knows all about it, swears it isn't a proper police box at all. Says four suspects were reported running away from it.'

'Did they get them?'

'No, fool of a policeman seems to have lost them. They could be miles away by now. Better get on to Immigration.

Tell them to let me know at once if any suspicious characters turn up.'

The hunt seemed to have moved away from their area and the Doctor and Jamie had emerged cautiously from hiding and were making their way past the scattered airport buildings in this relatively quiet corner of the field.

Suddenly Jamie pointed as a familiar blonde-haired figure came round the corner of one of the buildings.

'Look, there's Polly!' he cried.

'Polly!' called the Doctor. 'Over here!'

Polly ran over to them. 'Doctor, Jamie,' she gasped. 'I've just seen a man killed.'

Instinctively Jamie glanced upwards. 'By one of the flying beasties?'

'No, murdered, by this other man...'

The Doctor patted her awkwardly on the back. 'Now, get your breath back, Polly, then tell us all about it.'

Polly drew a deep breath. 'I went into this hangar, to get away from a policeman. There were these two men. One of them had some kind of a gun and he killed the other...'

'Did the murderer see you?' asked the Doctor.

'Yes, he chased me. But I managed to lose him.'

'And could you find this hangar again?'

Polly gestured in the direction from which she had come. 'Yes, I think so, it was over that way. And I remember a name over the door, Chameleon something-or-other...' She looked round. 'Where's Ben?'

'We haven't seen him since we split up, I'm afraid,' said the Doctor. 'Don't worry, I'm sure he'll turn up. Now, we'd better go and find this hangar of yours.'

'Must we?' asked Polly. 'What about the man with the gun? He might still be looking for me!'

'Of course we must!' said the Doctor firmly. This particular crime wasn't really his business of course. But then, neither were most of the problems he got himself mixed up in.

The Doctor disapproved very strongly of murder, and even the death of a man he'd never seen was a matter of concern to him. How had that poet chap he'd once met on Earth put it? 'Any man's death diminishes me.' That was it... Lost in thought, the Doctor hurried way.

Polly followed, still looking worried, and Jamie gave her a consoling hug. ‘Och, don’t worry, we’ll look after you.

Come on!’

They hurried after the Doctor. Though, had Polly but known, she had good reason to be afraid...

2

The Suspects

When Spencer returned from his attempt to catch, or rather kill. Polly, he found Blade standing over the body, staring down at it.

Spencer wasn’t all that surprised. Blade had a habit of appearing and disappearing with mysterious suddenness.

He looked up as Spencer entered. ‘Who was he?’

‘He found the postcards.’ began Spencer.

Blade rut him off. ‘His name?’

‘I don’t know.’

Blade looked at him for a moment then knelt beside the body, going through its pockets with swift efficiency, removing all identification. He straightened up, a little folder in his hand. ‘You appear to have killed a Detective Inspector Gascoigne. A policeman.’

There was no particular evidence of concern in Blade’s weary voice, or in Spencer’s reaction. The dead man’s profession was simply an item of information, nothing more.

‘Do you think one of the parents sent him?’ asked Spencer.

‘Possibly. It doesn’t matter. The main thing now is that no-one finds him. Arrange for his disposal.’ Blade turned, making for the inner office. Tossing the blanket back over the corpse, Spencer followed. They both passed through the little office and through into the secret control room beyond.

By the time Spencer came in, Blade was talking to someone over the communication console. ‘Very well. Get it over here as swiftly as possible.’ He turned to Spencer.

‘Another container is on the way.’ He held out the dead man’s wallet, warrant card, and various other papers of identification. ‘Destroy these.’

As Spencer took the papers Blade pointed to three suitcases stacked in the corner of the little control room.

‘Why are these still here?’

‘I’m sorry,’ said Spencer. ‘The man Gascoigne, the detective... He interrupted me.’

Once again, Blade just looked impassively at him.

Hurriedly Spencer touched a control and a panel in the wall slid back. One by one he thrust the suitcases through, and there was a faint rumble as the automatic conveyor belt bore them away. As the last suitcase disappeared, a warning signal sounded and the spy monitor lit up.

This time it showed the Doctor, Jamie and Polly standing over the body. The Doctor’s voice came through a speaker. ‘This man who did the killing... Would you recognise him again, Polly?’

‘Yes, of course I would. He chased me. I’d know him anywhere.’

Blade looked at Spencer. ‘Fool!’ he said dispassionately.

The Doctor knelt beside the body, examining it. He looked up. ‘How did you say this man was killed?’

‘He was shot, with some kind of pistol,’ replied Polly.

‘Can you describe it?’

‘Not really. I was too far away. Why?’

‘This man was killed by some kind of electric charge, Polly. There are marks on his hands and neck, and his clothes are scorched too.’

‘It was definitely some kind of gun, Doctor.’

‘No doubt. But a kind that’s not yet been developed on this planet.’

Blade looked at the scruffy little figure on the monitor.

‘This man they call the Doctor... Where does he get his knowledge?’

Spencer shrugged. ‘He looks like a normal human.’

There was a suggestion of contempt in his voice, as if a human being was something of very little account.

‘He appears to be much more intelligent,’ said Blade thoughtfully. ‘He could be a threat to our operation.’

‘Shall I kill him?’

Blade considered. ‘No. Get the girl first. She can identify you. We can always dispose of the man later.’

‘He may tell someone –’

‘What does it matter?’ interrupted Blade. ‘No-one will believe him.’

Carefully the Doctor spread the blanket over the body.

‘We must report this to the authorities at once.’

‘Maybe we could find the man in uniform who chased us?’ suggested,Jamie.

‘The policeman, you mean.?’ The Doctor shook his head. ‘We want to find the person who’s in charge of the whole place.’

Polly looked at the body. ‘Do we just leave him here?’

‘There’s nothing else we can do,’ said the Doctor practically. ‘Besides, we shouldn’t disturb the scene of the crime. Now, let’s try to find the main airport building.’

Spencer came out of the hidden control room, just in time to see Polly, at the rear of the little group, go out of the main door and turn left. He was thinking furiously.

There was another, smaller door at the far end of the little building and the intruders’ route would take them past it...

He sprinted to the little door and opened it a crack.

Through the gap, a moment later, he saw first the older man pass by, and then the young lad.

Spencer opened the door a little wider. As Polly came by he flung the door open, grabbed her from behind and clamped a hand over her

mouth to prevent her crying out.

He dragged her back through the little door and shoved it quietly closed with his foot.

As he dragged the wildly struggling girl back towards the inner control room, the Doctor and Jamie strode on, unaware, for the moment, that their little group had suddenly diminished...

Spencer pointed a silvery pen-like device at Polly, and she suddenly became still, staring dazedly ahead of her. After a moment she seemed to recover a little. ‘What happened to me?’ she murmured.

Spencer put away the device and produced his gun. :A temporary disablement. You will be back to normal in seconds. This way.’ He gestured with the gun, and Polly followed him up the steps to the raised area.

Spencer took her, still dazed and unresisting, through into the office, and then through the secret panel into the inner control room where Blade was waiting.

‘I’ve got her,’ announced Spencer, rather unnecessarily.

Blade gave him one of his weary looks. ‘So I see. Did anyone see you this time?’

‘No. She was behind her friends and they saw nothing.’

‘They’ll soon realise and come looking for me.’ said Polly defiantly.

‘Silence,’ said Blade coldly. ‘Sit down.’

She was thrust into a chair. Polly glared at them.

‘Murderers!’ she accused.

‘If we are, you had better treat us with respect,’ said Blade drily. ‘Now, which airline do you work for?’

‘I don’t understand.’

Blade sighed. ‘You must belong either to an airline or to the airport authority to be in this part of the airport at all.’

‘I’ve got nothing to do with the airport. We’d only just arrived here.’

‘Then what are you doing in this part of the airfield?’

‘We were lost,’ said Polly defensively. The exact circumstances of their arrival she decided had better be passed over as rapidly as possible. ‘I was looking for someone who could help me when I saw your friend here kill a man!’

Spencer said, ‘You say you’d just arrived? How did you get here?’

Before Polly could think of an answer. Blade said.

‘There’s very little point in questioning her. We’ve got her, and that’s all that matters.’

Polly shivered. It was clear from his tone that he had no intention of letting her go. ‘You don’t think my friends are just going to forget about me?’

The signal sounded again, and the two men looked at the spy monitor. Following their gaze, Polly saw a baffled-looking Doctor and Jamie staring about the hangar.

She heard Jamie’s voice: ‘I canna’ understand it, Doctor.

There’s no sign of Polly anywhere. Something must have happened to her.’

Seeing the two men absorbed in watching the picture on the screen, Polly made a hopeless dash for the sliding door.

Her plan was simply to hammer on it and yell, so as to let her friends know where she was, but long before she reached it Spencer had grabbed her again, putting his hand once more over her mouth. Polly struggled furiously, but without the slightest effect. The tall, thin man seemed to be inhumanly strong.

Abandoning her efforts, Polly stood still. She heard the Doctor’s voice coming through a speaker: ‘I’m afraid we’re just wasting time here, Jamie. The sooner we find the authorities and tell them everything the better. We’d better go.’ Blade switched off the monitor and looked thoughtfully at Polly. ‘You were right, your friends are worried about you. But I think we can do something to stop their worrying...’

He smiled and Polly felt a sudden chill of fear.

The Doctor and Jamie eventually got into the main airport building by

an obscure side door, and immediately found themselves trapped and lost in endless, featureless corridors, where muzak played faintly in the distance, and blurred voices made inaudible announcements.

They turned a corner and found themselves at the tail-end of a scurrying group of people. Hopefully the Doctor began to follow them. 'This seems to be the way, Jamie.

Come on!'

The moving group stretched out, slowed down and turned into a queue, moving slowly through the barrier of the immigration desk ahead, where an official was checking passports and passing the passengers through one by one.

Ignoring the outraged glares of the other passengers, the Doctor pushed his way to the head of the queue. 'I want to see someone in authority.'

The passport official, a bored young man called Jenkins, spoke without looking up from the passport he was examining. 'Just a moment, sir. All in good time.'

Deciding that the plump middle-aged lady in front of him probably wasn't the head of the KGB in disguise, Jenkins handed her back her passport and waved her on.

'Thank you very much, Madam.' He looked up at the Doctor. 'Now sir, your passport please.'

The Doctor snorted. 'I haven't got time for all that nonsense. I want to see someone in authority!'

' *I* am in authority, sir. Now, your passport please.'

'But I have something very urgent to report!'

'Yes, sir. *When* you've found your passport.' Jenkins beckoned to the next passenger. 'This way, sir...'

Brandishing his passport, the indignant passenger thrust his way past the Doctor, and the queue moved forward after him, sweeping the Doctor and Jamie aside like flotsam washed up by the tide.

'What's a passport, Doctor?' whispered Jamie.

'Oh, some official mumbo jumbo,' muttered the Doctor impatiently.

He shoved his way back to Jenkins's desk.

'Now listen, I have just discovered a dead body out there!'

The Doctor waved vaguely in the direction of the airfield.

Jenkins was unperturbed. 'Really, sir? If I were you I'd inform the police.'

'Then kindly tell me where I can find them.'

'You'll probably find an officer on duty in the main concourse, sir.'

'And where's that?'

Jenkins pointed past his own barrier. 'Over that way, sir.

Just go through that door over there.'

'Thank you,' said the Doctor impatiently.

As he moved forward, Jenkins put out his arm, barring his way. 'Passport please. sir!'

'Neither of as have *got* passports,' snapped the Doctor.

'Now, does that satisfy you?'

'I think you must be mistaken, sir,' said Jenkins. His voice had a kind of infuriating calmness, as if he was talking to an idiot, or a very small child. 'You couldn't have got *on* the aircraft without passports.'

'What aircraft?'

'The one you arrived on, sir.'

'We didn't come here on an aircraft,' said the Doctor, and knew he'd made a mistake as soon as the words were out of his mouth.

Jamie promptly made matters worse. 'Why not tell him about the TARDIS, Doctor?'

Jenkins looked up. 'TARDIS? What's that?'

'It's the way we got here,' said Jamie helpfully. Jenkins looked at the odd-looking pair, a suspicion forming in his mind. 'You gentlemen wouldn't know anything about a stray police box, would you?'

‘Aye, that’s right,’ said Jamie eagerly. ‘The TARDIS

looks like a police box but –’

He broke off as the Doctor kicked him hard on the ankle. But the damage was done. Jenkins was already reaching for his phone.

‘I don’t think our mode of conveyance is really relevant.’

said the Doctor hurriedly. ‘The important thing is that we have found a dead body and our friend has disappeared and I want to tell somebody about it; someone in authority.’

‘Oh, I think you’ll have plenty of opportunity to see someone in authority,’ said Jenkins grimly. ‘And very soon! Would you take a seat over there please?’ He pointed to a wall bench, and resignedly the Doctor led Jamie over to it.

Jenkins snatched up his phone and dialled. ‘Give me the Manager, please.... Hello, sir, Jenkins here. Immigration, Desk Five. I rather think I’ve got two of your suspects for you...’

After a good deal of wandering around the airport, undetected because he looked so ordinary, Ben had come full circle and found himself outside the little hangar with a sign reading *Chameleon Tours* over the door.

Unaware that he was following in Polly’s footsteps, he moved cautiously inside. ‘Hello? Anyone here?’ He raised his voice. ‘There must be someone around. Where are you?’

A man came out of the shadows at the back of the hangar. He wore an airline pilot’s overcoat and cap and a white silk scarf. He had a broad, curiously cat-like face and hooded eyes. He was staring intently at Ben, a suspicious, hostile stare. His hand disappeared under his coat and came out with something that glinted metallically.

As Ben stared bark at him in puzzlement, a voice spoke from the doorway. ‘Hello! Captain Blade about?’ A girl stood in the doorway. The uniformed man came forward.

‘I’m Captain Blade. You were looking for me?’

The girl said, ‘Yes, I’m Jean Rock, the Manager’s secretary. I’ve got your flight schedules here. They’re all in order.’

Blade took the sheaf of documents. ‘Thank you.’

With a friendly nod to Ben, the girl disappeared.

Blade swung round, his face cold and hostile. ‘What do you want?’

Ben didn’t feel inclined to linger. ‘I’m just looking for the way out, mate.’

‘You are on private property. Visitors are not welcome.

Are you a member of the airport staff?’

‘Yeah, that’s right,’ said Ben hurriedly. ‘Just started today. I didn’t mean to come in here, I just got lost, see.’

‘Are you certain of that?’

‘Of course I am,’ retorted Ben. ‘Now, are you going to direct me or not?’

The man called Blade looked at Ben with an expression of ironic amusement, as though he didn’t believe a word Ben was saying but was quite unconcerned about it.

‘Of course I’ll help you,’ he said amusedly. ‘Just follow me and I’ll send you on your way...’

3

Man Without A Face

The Doctor and the Commandant stood glaring at each other, neither liking what he saw. The problem was that they were so very unlike.

‘A typical bureaucrat,’ the Doctor was thinking. ‘Neat, fussy, precise and authoritarian. Quite unable to cope with anything outside his normal frame of reference.’

‘Scruffy,’ thought the Commandant. ‘Excitable, anarchic, eccentric! Probably made the whole thing up as some kind of twisted joke.’

He fixed the Doctor with a look of steely disbelief. ‘You say this young lady, this friend of yours, actually witnessed the murder?’

‘Yes,’ said the Doctor defiantly. ‘She saw the man killed.’

‘Aye that’s right,’ confirmed Jamie. ‘He was electrocuted, with a ray gun!’

Once again, Jamie’s well-meaning intervention did far more harm than good. The Commandant stared at him.

‘With a *what*?’

‘It doesn’t matter what sort of gun it was,’ said the Doctor hastily. ‘He was killed – and my friend saw it happen!’

‘Then where is she? I want to talk to her.’

‘Aye, well, that’s another problem,’ said Jamie gloomily.

‘She’s vanished.’

The Commandant said wearily, ‘Ray guns, people vanishing... You’re sure this isn’t some kind of joke?’ Like leaving a police box on a runway, he was thinking.

‘You wouldn’t think it a joke if you’d just come and see the body,’ spluttered the Doctor indignantly.

The Manager looked at Jenkins. ‘What flight did these people come in on?’

‘Well sir, they arrived at the desk with the passengers from Flight 729 from Madrid. But they deny being on the flight, and apparently they have no passports.’

As far as the Commandant was concerned, being on the wrong side of the barrier without a passport was just as serious a crime as murder. Possibly worse.

Immediately he seized upon this new offence. ‘I see.

Perhaps you would like to explain why you have no passports?’

The Doctor drew himself up to his not very impressive height and spoke in a loud, firm voice. ‘We are all wasting time,’ he announced. ‘Are you coming to have a look at this body, or must I find someone who really is in charge of this place?’

The Commandant rose to the challenge. ‘ *I* am in charge of this place, thank you very much! I want you both to accompany me to this hangar you speak of immediately.’

‘Thank you very much,’ said the Doctor ironically. He was being ordered, he reflected, to do exactly what he’d wanted to do all along. Still, as long as they got there...

‘Jenkins!’ snapped the Commandant. ‘Tell Air Traffic Control where I am.’

His face saved and his authority restored, the Commandant waved the Doctor and Jamie back the way they had come and followed after them.

Jenkins watched them go and then picked up the phone and dialled: ‘Immigration here, Desk Five. Number One’s just on his way over to the hangar area, he asked me to let you know. As far as I call gather, he’s gone to look for a dead body...’ He listened to the voice at the other end for a moment, then grinned. ‘Yes, I know. It’s going to be one of those days, isn’t it?’

Blade was hard at work.

He took a postcard bearing a picture of the Eiffel Tower from a stack, took a French postage stamp from a sheet, stuck the stamp onto the postcard and then put the card onto another stack.

He reached for another postcard, another stamp.

It was boring, monotonous work, but it was very necessary. It was awkward too, working in this cramped space, but since Spencer had carelessly allowed Gascoigne to find the stack of postcards Blade had decided to take no chances.

The sliding door opened and Spencer came in.

Blade went on working. ‘Have you dealt with her?’ he asked.

‘She’s being processed now. They say they can take another as well.’

‘Excellent.’ Blade rose and went to a tall green cabinet that occupied the whole of one corner of the little control room. It gave off a faint, almost, inaudible hum, like a refrigerator. Blade took a small plastic box from the top of the cabinet, opened it and took out a large hypodermic.

He opened the door of the cabinet and an arm flopped out, dangling lifelessly. The arm ended in a blobby shapeless hand with fingers like sausages.

Lifting the arm, Blade made a careful injection into the veins above the wrist. Then he tucked the arm back into the compartment and closed the door.

Suddenly the warning note sounded and the spy monitor came to life. A little group of people appeared on the screen...

Jamie stared blankly down at the spot where they had found the body. 'It's gone!' he announced unbelievigly.

'You're sure this is the right hangar?' the Commandant asked sarcastically.

'Aye, the name's over the door outside. And the body was right here!'

The Doctor frowned. 'Well, let's just see what we've got here. There are bound to be traces.' He rummaged in his pockets and produced a large magnifying glass. a pair of tweezers and an envelope.

Kneeling down, he examined the dusty floor through the magnifying glass and picked something up with tweezers.

The Commandant regarded him with weary exasperation. 'What exactly do you think you're doing?'

'Gathering evidence for the police of course.

Unfortunately I can't tell them who the victim was.'

'Some sort of mystery man no doubt?'

Impervious to the Commandant's sarcasm, the Doctor nodded eagerly. 'As a matter of fact he was. Nothing in his pockets to identify him, you see.'

'Nothing in his pockets?'

'That's right. I was surprised myself. Hang on a minute, there *was* something.. ' The Doctor fished in his top pocket and handed something to the Commandant. 'This!'

'A postage stamp?'

'Ah yes,' said the Doctor solemnly. 'But it's Spanish, you see. And unused!'

The Commandant sighed. 'I see. I suppose that makes all the

difference?'

'Exactly!' said the Doctor.' He resumed his examination of the floor. 'Ah, now this is interesting!'

'What have you found now?'

'Fibres—burnt fibres!' Carefully the Doctor put the tiny charred shreds of cloth into his envelope. Jamie was examining the side of a packing case close to the spot where they'd found the body. 'Just look at this, Doctor. We must have missed it earlier. It's a burn mark.'

The Doctor studied the side of the packing case. 'Quite right, Jamie, and a very recent one too. I'm glad to see someone's using their intelligence.' The Doctor glared reproachfully at the Commandant.

By now the Commandant had had more than enough.

'Now see here...' he began.

But the Doctor wasn't listening. He was absorbed in the study of the burn mark.

The Commandant tried again. 'You're coming with me...'

'You know, Jamie,' said the Doctor, ignoring the Commandant, 'this mark was almost certainly caused by some kind of ray gun.'

The Commandant said explosively, 'Ray guns, burnt fibres, foreign stamps—'

' *Unused* foreign stamps,' corrected the Doctor.

'All right, unused foreign stamps. I must be as mad as you are even to be listening to you!'

The Doctor got up, and thoughtfully wiped his hands on his voluminous handkerchief 'You know what they've done with it, of course?'

'Done with what?'

'The body. Somewhere round here there's a very large packing case.'

Jamie pointed. 'Like that one over there, Doctor?' The packing case to which Jamie was pointing stood in a gloomy corner of the hangar. It was long and low and ominously coffin-like in shape.

The Doctor hurried over to it. ‘Thank you, Jamie.’ He began heaving at the lid, but it was firmly nailed down.

Suddenly a man in pilot’s uniform appeared from the inner office. He watched the Doctor’s efforts for a moment, then said politely, ‘Can I help you?’

‘Arc you connected with Chameleon Tours?’ demanded the Commandant.

‘Yes. I’m Captain Blade, the Chief Pilot.’

The Commandant waved towards the Doctor and Jamie.

‘These gentlemen seem to think there’s been an incident in this hanger...’ he began.

‘An incident?’

Feeling like a complete idiot the Commandant said awkwardly, ‘Would you mind if we took a look inside this packing case?’

Blade looked paroled. ‘Well, no, not at all if you really want to... May I ask who you are?’

‘Charles Gordon. I’m the Airport Manager.’

‘Well, in that case, of course,’ said Blade. He took a crowbar from a nearby shelf, prised off the nails holding down the lid one by one. ‘May l ask what you expect to find?’

‘A dead man!’ said Jamie dramatically.

Blade gave him an amused look, and lifted off the packing case lid with a flourish.

Everyone crowded round eagerly. The case was filled with plastic cups, thousands of them, neatly stacked in long rolls, one inside the other.

The Commandant took out a cup, glared at it, then threw it back in the case. ‘Plastic cups!’ He turned angrily to the Doctor. ‘I think I’d like to do a little investigating of my own now.’

‘Oh, good!’ said the Doctor brightly. ‘I’m glad I’ve succeeded in rousing your interest.’

‘Oh, yes, you’ve certainly managed to do that,’ said the Commandant furiously. ‘And do you know what I want to investigate? The question of who you are, and what you’re doing in my airport!’ He turned to the man in the pilot’s uniform. ‘Thank you, Captain Blade.’ He beckoned imperiously to the Doctor and Jamie. ‘You two, come with me!’ He marched towards the door.

The Doctor sighed. ‘We’d better humour him, Jamie.

Come on!’ They followed the Commandant from the hangar.

Blade waited long enough to ensure that they were well clear of the hangar then turned and called, ‘All right, bring him down!’

Spencer appeared, leading a shambling figure by the elbow. It wore a long pilot’s overcoat, the collar turned high, and a pilot’s cap pulled low. The peak of the cap shaded the upper part of the face, and a white silk scarf concealed the lower part.

Blade came forward and took the muffled figure’s other elbow and helped it to negotiate the steps. The figure stumbled, and reached out, clasping the rail with a shapeless hand.

‘All right?’ said Blade urgently.

The muffled head nodded slowly.

Moving with painful slowness and guided by its two helpers, the figure moved down the steps and across the hangar towards the door. ‘Will he survive?’ whispered Spencer.

‘If we hurry,’ said Blade grimly.

Moving as quickly as they could, they led the shambling figure towards the door.

‘That’s the idea,’ said Blade encouragingly. ‘You’ve only got to get to the airport building and you’ll be safe.’ The figure stumbled, and then recovered.

‘He’s reaching suffocation point,’ said Blade grimly.

‘We’d better hurry!’

The Doctor, Jamie and the Commandant were back at the Immigration desk, where a somewhat bemused Jenkins was still on duty. The Doctor was still protesting: ‘If you’d only given me a chance to make a

really thorough search of that place –'

The Commandant interrupted him. 'That hangar is leased to a private charter company. I've no right to search it myself, let alone you. Now, will you please sit down over there and be quiet!' He turned to Jenkins. 'Get me Superintendent Reynolds, would you Jenkins? This is a job for them—these people are obviously trespassing.'

'I'm afraid I've just got another flight coming through, sir.' They could already hear the sound of many footsteps coming towards the desk.

'Very well, I'll attend to it myself.' He picked up Jenkins's phone.

The Doctor and Jamie were sitting glumly on the same wall-bench as before when the first passengers began arriving at the desk.

Suddenly Jamie grabbed the Doctor's arm. 'Look!' he said.

The Doctor looked: Polly was walking towards the desk with the other passengers. The Doctor jumped to his feet, interrupting the Commandant's call. 'That's the girl we told you about,' he said. 'The one who found the body!'

The Commandant said, 'Excuse me will you, Superintendent. I'll call you back.' He put down the phone and said irritably, ' *What* girl?'

The Doctor pointed to Polly who was standing at the desk, passport in hand, looking like any other traveller.

'This one! Hello, Polly!'

Polly gave him a puzzled look. 'I beg your pardon?' The Commandant indicated the Doctor and Jamie, who had come over to join him. 'Do you know these gentlemen?'

Astonishingly, Polly said, 'No. Why? Am I supposed to?'

'According to them, they know you.'

The Doctor gave Polly a reproachful look. 'Polly, what's going on? Where have you been?'

She stared at him in astonishment. 'I think there must be some mistake, my name's not Polly—and I've never seen you before in my life!'

Steering and supporting the muffled figure between them, Spencer

and Blade made their way across the tarmac and into the main airport building.

They guided their shambling charge along the corridors, up an escalator, across the main concourse and through a set of automatic glass doors marked *Medical Centre*.

They led their charge through the foyer and Blade unlocked a door to an inner room, which was furnished with couches and examination tables.

They helped the figure to sit on one of the low tables and Blade took off the cap and scarf, revealing the creature's head.

There were no features, and except for the eyes nothing you could call a face. Nothing but a completely blank sphere, across which ran pulsating veins...

4

The Transfer

The Commandant was doing his despairing best to get things sorted out. 'Are you quite sure you've never seen these men before? They say they know you.'

Polly, or rather the girl who looked so astonishingly like Polly but maintained she was someone else, gave him a wide-eyed stare. 'But they can't know me. This is my first visit to England!'

'Polly, it's us,' said Jamie appealingly. 'Look—it's me, Jamie, and the Doctor!'

The Doctor looked thoughtfully at the girl. 'Would you mind telling us your name?' he asked.

'No, of course not. I am Michèlle Leuppi from Zurich.'

'Do you have a passport?' demanded the Commandant.

'Yes, of course. Here.' She handed it over. 'Excuse me, but have I done something wrong?'

The Commandant leafed through the passport and handed it back. 'I don't think there's anything for you to worry about. May I just ask what you will he doing in England?'

‘I have come here to work. Sec, here is my work permit.’

The Commandant took the document, studied it and then handed it back. ‘Yes, that seems to be quite in order,’

he said.

‘Where did you learn such excellent English?’ snapped the Doctor.

Again the wide-eyed innocent stare. ‘I had an English governess. Please, would you tell me what is happening?’

‘Nothing that need concern you, miss,’ said the Commandant in almost fatherly tones. ‘Everything seems to be in order. If you’d like to go through now?’

‘Thank you.’

The girl went through the barrier and began walking away.

‘Polly, wait!’ yelled Jamie. He tried to follow her through the barrier but the Commandant barred his way.

‘Just a minute young man,’ he said.

‘But she *is* a friend of ours – and she saw a murder!’

The Commandant snatched up the phone on the desk beside the barrier and began to dial. ‘You’re staying here till the police arrive – understand?’

‘Ah, you’re going to tell the police about the body,’ said the Doctor. ‘Very sensible.’

‘I’m calling the police in order to tell them about you!’

snarled the Commandant, and then spoke into the phone.

‘Hello, Superintendent? I’ve got a couple of suspicious characters for you. Illegal entry, I shouldn’t wonder....

Yes... Immigration Desk Number Five.’

‘You know, Jamie,’ said the Doctor thoughtfully, ‘I don’t think we’re really welcome here any longer. Ready?

When I say go, we go!’ The Doctor studied the situation for a moment.

The Commandant was earnestly talking into the phone, Jenkins was checking the last few arrivals through...

'Right—go!' said the Doctor.

Before anyone could stop them the Doctor and Jamie shot past the barrier and ran out of the reception area, disappearing into the crowds that thronged the main concourse.

'Look out, sir, they're getting away,' yelled Jenkins. But Jenkins was far too well trained to leave his post and go in pursuit of the Doctor and Jamie, and the Commandant had no intention of chasing fugitives through his own airport.

He spoke calmly into the phone. 'Superintendent? The situation's changed. They'vejust made a run for it. I want them picked up right away, please. I'll just give you their descriptions...'

In the medical centre, Blade and Spencer were going through a series of routine operations with the practised calm of those who have carried out the same tasks many times before.

The blob-headed faceless creature, a sort of unfinished model of a human being, lay gasping painfully on one of the couches. On a parallel couch close by lay a body, covered with a sheet. Satisfied that all was ready, Blade pulled the sheet away. Beneath it lay Meadows, the Air Traffic Controller.

A handsome-looking woman in a nurse's uniform came through the doors.

'Quickly,' said Blade urgently. 'He's suffocating!'

'You were twenty minutes late,' said the nurse dispassionately. She went to a store cupboard, unlocked it, and produced two devices that looked like large metallic arm-bands, one black and o white. The white one she handed to Blade, the black to Spencer. Moving with the same unhurried precision, Blade began clamping the white band to Meadows's bare forearm, while Spencer attached the black band to the shapeless creature that lay gasping on the table.

The nurse meanwhile was wheeling a complex piece of apparatus to a position between the two tables. It looked somewhat like an X-ray machine, though its real function was very different. She began connecting the apparatus to the black sheath on one side and the white one on the other with a network of fine electronic cables. Blade

looked down at the motionless human figure. ‘Who is he?’

‘Air Traffic Control—his name’s Meadows,’ said the nurse briefly.

Blade nodded. ‘Good. He could be very useful to us.’

The nurse switched on the apparatus, which began humming with power.

The two figures on the tables were both affected, though very differently. The still figure of Meadows began jerking and twitching galvanically. But the shapeless gasping figure on the other table became calm and still. On the round blank head, the outline of features began to form.

They were the features of Meadows...

With majestic dignity, two very large policemen strode through the busy airport concourse, cleaving through the sea of camera-laden Japanese tourists, Majorca-bound family parties and rucksack-bearing Australians and Scandinavians.

They passed a photo-booth, noting idly the jeaned legs protruding beneath the drawn half-curtain. They were looking for three fugitives: an oddly-dressed little man, another younger man, and a lad in a kilt. (There had been a fourth fugitive, a girl, but apparently she’d been identified as a genuine traveller.)

Anyway, they were looking for men on the run, and everyone knows a man on the run doesn’t stop to have his picture taken.

The policemen passed on. Inside the booth, Ben gave a sigh of relief...

Proceeding on much the same assumptions, the policemen passed a bench on which sat two travellers their faces hidden behind newspapers. A more observant officer might have noted that one of the papers was in German, and held upside-down...

This paper was lowered as the policemen passed on.

‘They’re going to go on hunting for us, Doctor,’ said Jamie worriedly.

The Doctor lowered his paper. ‘Then we shall just have to keep out of their way until we’ve proved our story.’

‘We’ve a fine chance of doing that – with Polly pretending she doesn’t even know us!’

‘I don’t think she was pretending, Jamie. In fact, I don’t think that was really Polly.’

‘But it *was* Polly!’ protested Jamie. ‘We saw her!’

The Doctor chuckled. ‘Don’t believe everything you see, Jame,’ he said mysteriously.

At the far end of the long concourse the two police-men had wheeled round and were on their may back. Jamie, with a much-hunted man’s awareness of the movement of enemies, had registered the change of direction. ‘Look out, Doctor!’

They raised the spread newspapers until the two policemen had moved on.

‘It’s all right now, Doctor,’ Jamie reassured him. But the Doctor wasn’t just hiding behind his paper, he was actually reading it. ‘What was the name over that hangar, Jamie?

The one where we found the body.’

Jamie frowned. ‘Polly said it was... aye, that’s it!

Chameleon something.’

‘Yes, of course. Chameleon Tours.’ He folded the paper open and passed it to Jamie. ‘And here’s an advertisement for Chameleon Youth Tours. “Budget Tours for young people between eighteen and twenty-five.” ’

‘What do they mean, budget?’

‘Inexpensive, Jamie. Cheap! This could be the bait. Do you know what a chameleon is?’

Jamie shrugged. ‘Just a name, isn’t it?’

‘It is the name of asmall lizard,’ said the Doctor precisely. ‘A lizard that can change its colour to merge with its background. It’s a term that’s sometimes applied to people who change their appearance or personality to suit their own ends. Jamie, there’s something going on here we don’t fully understand yet.’ The Doctor’s tone made it clear that he had every intention of finding out.

A voice hissed, ‘Doctor! Jamie!’ They looked up. ‘Ben!’

said the Doctor delightedly. ‘Are you all right?’

‘I’m okay,’ the sailor said. ‘Where did you two get to?

And where’s Polly?’

‘We’ve got a lot to tell you Ben, but first we’ve got to find somewhere to hide. There are some rather tiresome people after us – something to do with passports.’

Ben grinned. ‘Don’t worry, Doctor, I’ve got the very place.’

On one of the couches there now lay a creature that looked exactly like Air Traffic Controller Meadows. It wore Meadows’s clothes, and it wore Meadows’s face. On another couch the real Meadows lay motionless and drained.

The nurse, whose name was Pinto, switched off the machine.

‘Is he all right?’ demanded Blade.

‘We’ll have to see,’ said Nurse Pinto. Her voice betrayed no emotion.

She and Blade took hold of the Chameleon Meadows and sat him upright on the edge of the couch. Taking a pin from the front of her apron she jabbed it into Meadows’s hand. Meadows jumped.

Nurse Pinto pointed to an optical chart on the opposite wall. ‘Read the first line!’ she commanded.

The creature blinked and the first line blurred and then came dear. Inarticulate croaking sounds came from the creature’s throat.

‘Adjust vocal control,’ snapped Nurse Pinto.

Blade adjusted a dial set into the sheath on the Chameleon Meadows’s arm.

‘Try now,’ ordered Nurse Pinto.

‘D…G…F…Q…R…L…’

At first the voice was blurred, but by the time all the letters on the chart had been read out the Chameleon was speaking in a firm, clear voice – Meadows’s voice.

Nurse Pinto stepped back. ‘Preliminary test complete.’

She took a personnel file from a nearby shelf and handed it to Blade.

He opened it, studied it for a moment and then went to stand over the Chameleon. ‘Who are you?’ he asked.

‘My name is George Meadows,’ came the reply.

‘Where do you work?’

‘In Air Traffic Control.’

‘Where do you live?’

‘Ten, Sylvia Avenue, Stanmore.’

Blade frowned. ‘Ten?’

‘We lived at Number Thirty-Four until last week. I’ve been too busy to tell Personnel about the change.’

Blade closed the file. ‘Excellent!’

Trying to look like typical travellers killing time before take-off, the Doctor, Ben and Jamie strolled through the busy concourse.

Ben was glancing all around, alert for policemen or security staff. His eyes fell on a little kiosk set into the side of the concourse. It was the usual sort of thing, the kind of set-up used by car-hire firms or travel agencies, a counter for the public with behind it a tiny office bright with posters and leaflets. Behind the counter a fair-haired girl was working on some papers.

‘Look, it’s Polly!’ he cried. Ben started forwards, but the Doctor put a hand on his arm. ‘So it is – but look who she’s working for!’ He pointed to the sign over the Kiosk: *Chameleon Tours*.

‘Leave this to me,’ said the Doctor quietly. He strolled over to the kiosk, and the others followed close behind him.

‘Hello Polly,’ said the Doctor gently.

The girl looked up, her face cold. ‘Please go away,’ she said.

‘Polly, something has happened to you. I want you to try to remember back to the point where we left the hangar.’

‘I don’t know what you’re talking about.’

‘Think, Polly. There were three of us in that hangar.

You’d found something very important and you were showing it to us. Can you remember what it was?’

The voice was flat and uninterested: ‘I tell you, I don’t know what you are talking about.’

‘In the Chameleon Hangar,’ said the Doctor urgently.

‘You saw what happened. You told us you’d seen the man who did it.’

‘I didn’t see anything. You most be mad. If I’d seen anyone shot, I’d have gone to the police –’

The girl stopped talking, conscious that she’d somehow betrayed herself.

‘Shot?’ said the Doctor quietly.

‘I mean murdered…’

‘I didn’t say anyone was shot, Polly. Or even murdered.’

For the first time the girl showed some trace of emotion.

‘I tell you I don’t know what you’re talking about. Please leave me alone.’ She turned back to her paperwork.

Ben had been listening to all this in astonishment.

‘What’s happened to her, Doctor?’

‘That’s what we’ve got to find out – and we will, I promise you! Now, let’s find this place where we can talk.’

It had been an interesting experiment, thought the Doctor, as Ben led them across the concourse. Polly – if she was Polly – still had access to all her memories. Yet for some reason she was determined to deny them…

There was a sectioned-off cubicle at the back of the Chameleon Tours kiosk, and Blade sat there, watching the exchange on a monitor. When the Doctor and his friends moved away Blade said, ‘Come in here.’

He spoke in a whisper, but on the monitor Polly raised her head, hearing the words in her mind. She rose and came into the cubicle.

Blade said, ‘I was going to brief you for this assignment, but there is no longer any purpose.’

‘I have failed, then?’

‘Circumstances were against you,’ said Blade emotionlessly. ‘I’ll make arrangements for you to leave on the next flight.’

‘Back to base?’

‘Yes. Some other use will be found for you.’

‘What about that man and his friends? They’re very persistent.’

Blade gave her one of his mirthless smiles. ‘Do not worry about them. We have ways of dealing with such people...’

5

The Missing

The creature in the shape of George Meadows strolled casually into Air Traffic Control, tapped a colleague on the shoulder and relieved him at the console.

When Jean Rock followed him into the room a moment later, everything seemed normal.

The Manager had a visitor at his desk and they seemed to be locked in argument. She sighed and moved over to them, ready to smooth things down.

The Manager’s visitor was a burly dark-suited man with a heavy moustache. In his quiet, conventional way he looked even more formidable than the Commandant himself.

‘And you’re sure you haven’t seen him, sir?’ the visitor was saying.

The Commandant snorted. ‘ *Quite* sure!’ He looked up, relieved as Jean arrived. ‘This is my personal assistant, Jean Rock. Jean, this is Detective-Inspector Crossland.

Give him any help you can, will you?’ He nodded to Crossland. ‘Now, if you’ll excuse me?’

As the Commandant strode away, Jean gave Crossland a placating smile. ‘Now, what can I do for you?’

‘Well, I think I’ll need a pass for a start.’

‘That’s easily arranged.’ Jean went to her desk and began filling out the necessary forms. ‘Is that all?’

‘For the moment.’ A rueful smile softened the heavy lines of his face. ‘To tell you the truth, I’m a bit baffled.

You see, I was supposed to meet one of my colleagues here today, an Inspector Gascoigne.’

Jean went on writing. ‘Yes?’

He was investigating a missing person on one of your charter flights. The funny thing is, Gascoigne just hasn’t shown up!’

Jean was filling out a pass. ‘Detective-Inspector Crossland....’ She reached for a record form. ‘What shall I say your business is?’

‘Oh, just put, “Investigation into Chameleon Youth

‘Tours”.’

Jamie was perched on an uncomfortably narrow bench inside a tiny curtained cubicle, staring into a circular glass screen. The bench wouldn’t have been all that big for one, but with the Doctor on one side and Ben on the other, they were jammed so tight Jamie wondered if he’d ever get out again. ‘What is this place?’ he asked.

‘It’s a sort of machine that takes your photograph,’

explained Ben.

‘Photograph?’

‘Never mind about that now, Jamie,’ said the Doctor hurriedly. ‘You know, what puzzles me is that girl pretending to be Polly... yet, in a way, it was Polly.’

‘Maybe she’s been brainwashed?’ suggested Ben.

‘I doubt if there’d have been time. Whatever happened to Polly happened pretty quickly.’

‘Quick,’ hissed Ben. ‘Someone’s coming!’

An elderly lady drew back the curtain and saw the Doctor, Jamie and

Ben all staring into the lens with fixed toothy grins.

She gave them a shocked glare, re-drew the curtains and hurried away.

'We've got to know more about Chameleon Youth Tours,' the Doctor went on. 'The trouble is, we can't more about freely while the authorities are chasing us.'

'It's a bit easier for me,' said Ben. 'They didn't get much of a look at me. Besides, I don't, er...' He looked at the Doctor and Jamie in turn. 'I don't stand out so much,' he said tactfully.

'That's true,' said the Doctor. 'So, if you could investigate their hangar...'

'Leave it to me,' said Ben confidently. 'What about you?'

The Doctor sighed. 'I'm afraid there's only one thing I can do. I'm going to find the man who's in charge of this airport again and try to convince him that there's a murderer at large.'

Jamie looked from one to the other and decided that there was a better chance of action with Ben. 'I'll cone with you,' he announced.

'No, Jamie,' said the Doctor firmly. 'I want you to go back to the Chameleon Tours kiosk and keep an eye on that girl who looks like Polly.'

The girl who looked like Polly was still shuffling paperwork at the Chameleon Tours desk. Another girl approached, a round-faced, dark-haired girl who looked as if she might normally be a rather jolly, cheeky type. But at the moment she appeared tired and worried, and her eyes looked as if she'd been crying.

Timidly she went up to the counter. 'Are you in charge here?' she asked. There was a faint nasal twang to her voice.

The Polly girl looked at the scruffy little figure and said disdainfully, 'Yes. Can I help you?'

'I'm Samantha Briggs. I've come down from Liverpool.'

'Really?'

'It's about my brother, Brian Briggs –'

‘What about him?’ interrupted the blonde girl brusquely.

‘He went on one of your tours, to Rome, and he’s disappeared.’

‘I’m sorry, I don’t follow.’

‘It’s quite simple. I tried to get the telephone number of the hotel you sent him to in Rome, and the operator said they’d never heard of him.’

‘Then the operator must have made a mistake,’ said the blonde girl coldly.

‘Anyway, I got in touch with the police and they couldn’t find him at any hotel in Rome.’

‘Then perhaps he changed his mind and went on somewhere else.’

Samantha Briggs slapped a grubby picture postcard down on the counter. ‘Then what about this? A postcard from Brian, posted in Rome!’

The blonde girl picked up the postcard and studied it.

On the front was a garish picture of the Fountain of Trevi, and the back bore a simple scrawled message of the ‘wish you were here’ variety. ‘That is rather odd,’ she agreed.

‘Would you like me to make some enquiries?’

There was a sharp edge to Samantha’s voice. ‘Why do you think I’ve come all the way down from Liverpool?’

‘Well – since you’ve already been to the police, why *have* you come?’

Samantha choked back a sob. ‘Because the police didn’t seem very interested. They said dozens of people go missing every week and they just haven’t got the men to go chasing after them all.’

‘I see. What did you say your brother’s name was?’

‘Brian Briggs. Would you like me to spell it for you?’

‘That won’t be necessary,’ said the blonde girl calmly. ‘If you don’t mind waiting, I’ll see what I can find out.’

She turned and made her way to the rear of the kiosk.

Samantha Briggs pulled a face at her retreating back.

In the rear room, the girl sat at the monitor screen and touched a control on the console beneath. Spencer's face appeared.The girl said, 'Is Captain Blade there?'

'No.'

'I need to speak to him—urgently. There's relative making enquiries about a missing passenger.' Briefly she told him what had happened.

'I'll ask Captain Blade to call you as soon as he returns.

It shouldn't be very long.'

The screen went dark.

The girl reappeared at the counter. 'The man I wanted to speak to wasn't available, but they're trying to find him.

Will you wait?'

'I've got nothing else to do, have I? I'll be on that bench over there.'

Fuming, Samantha marched to the nearest bench and sat down. She was dimly aware of someone else on the other end of the bench. At first she thought it was another girl. Then she realised it was a pleasant-looking young man in a kilt and a roll-neck sweater. He was reading a newspaper.

Fishing a handkerchief out of her pocket, Samantha blew her nose hard, struggling to hold back tears of tiredness and depression. 'Stuck-up thing,' she muttered.

Beside her the young Scot lowered his paper. 'Is something the matter?'

Samantha gave him a tearful smile. 'Sorry, I didn't mean you. It's that girl over there. She couldn't care less.'

'About your brother being missing?'

'Yes, but how –'

'I couldn't help overhearing. Do you think something's happened to him?'

‘That’s just the trouble, I don’t know. I’m sure he can take care of himself, but all the same...’

‘I might be able to help you,’ said the young man mysteriously. ‘I can’t tell you any more now but I’d like you to meet a friend of mine called the Doctor. I’m sure he’ll know what’s the best thing to do.’ He held out his hand. ‘My name’s Jamie.’

Samantha shook hands. ‘Samantha Briggs.’

Abruptly the young man disappeared behind his newspaper. Samantha looked up and saw a policeman strolling past.

The Commandant, back at his desk was rapidly working his way through a pile of paperwork.

Order was being restored. They were back on schedule.

Planes were landing and taking off with a beautiful, mathematically precise regularity that delighted the Commandant’s orderly soul. If only nothing else went wrong he might actually win his daily battle against the forces of chaos.

Jean Rock appeared at his elbow. ‘Excuse me, sir.’

The Commandant went on working. ‘What is it?’

‘There’s a gentleman asking to see you. Well, insisting, really!’ There was a hint of amusement in her voice.

‘Did he say what it was about?’

‘Well, yes sir. He says it’s about a dead body.’

A dreadful suspicion was dawning in the Commandant’s mind. ‘I see. Bring him in.’

Jean went to the door. ‘Will you come in, please?’

A small shabby figure in a scruffy frock-coat sidled into the room. Spotting the Commandant, he hurried up to him with a beaming smile. ‘How very nice to see you again!’

The Commandant shuddered and picked up the phone.

‘Airport Police please.’

‘You might at least listen to what I’ve got to say,’

protested the Doctor.

‘I heard quite enough the last time you were here...’ The Commandant listened to the phone for a moment and then snapped, ‘What do you mean, they’re engaged. This is the Airport Manager. Get me someone senior on the line immediately:

‘If you’re going to talk to the police,’ said the Doctor,

‘tell them there’s something mysterious going on in this airport, something that will endanger more human lives.’

The Commandant ignored him. ‘Hello? This is the Airport Manager. Will you get some men down here quickly please. One of the fugitives has turned up... yes, a complete lunatic!’

The Doctor tried again. ‘Since I’m obviously going to he arrested may I make one last request? Listen to me for just one minute.’

‘Not for one second,’ shouted the Commandant. ‘I’ve heard all I want to about ray guns, dead bodies, disappearing people...’

‘I tell you there was a dead body in the Chameleon Tours hangar!’

‘Chameleon Tours?’ said Jean Rock.

The Doctor turned round, hoping he’d found an ally.

‘Yes, that’s right. Do you know something about them?’

Jean looked at the Commandant. ‘Sir, that’s the place Detective Inspector Crossland was interested in. And his colleague, Inspector Gascoigne. The one who’s –’

‘All right, Jean, I’ll handle this,’ interrupted the Commandant. He looked up relieved as two policemen hurried into the room. ‘Ah, there you are! Take this madman away, put him under lock and key and keep him there!’

The Doctor backed away as the police closed in Suddenly his hand flashed into his pocket, reappearing with something round and black. ‘Get back!’ he shouted.

‘One step nearer and I’ll blow you all to smithereens!’

Convinced that they really were dealing with a dangerous madman the two policemen froze.

The Doctor backed to the door, pausing when he reach it. ‘Catch,’ he shouted and lobbed what he was holding at the Commandant.

The Commandant, a keen cricketer in his day took the catch automatically, and found himself holding not a deadly grenade but a child’s rubber ball. He looked at the door, but the Doctor had disappeared.

‘After him!’ screamed the Commandant, and the policemen dashed from the room.

The Commandant looked at his paperwork and sighed.

Suddenly he was beginning to feel that chaos was winning after all...

6

The Trap

The girl who looked like Polly was talking to Blade on the monitor.

‘That’s quite clear, I hope?’ said Blade. ‘You know what to tell her?’

‘Yes.’

‘As soon as you’ve dealt with the girl, close the kiosk and leave on the next flight.’

The girl left the rear cubicle, went back to her counter and called, ‘Miss Briggs.’

Samantha Briggs hurried over from her bench. ‘Have you found anything?’ she asked hopefully.

‘Nothing that helps very much, I’m afraid. Your brother definitely travelled on our flight to Rome, but there’s absolutely no record of what he did when he left the plane.

I’m afraid there’s nothing more I can tell you.’

Samantha Briggs wasn’t the girl to give up after all this time. ‘If you can’t tell me any more, then who can?’

‘We’re dealing with thousands of passengers, Miss Briggs,’ said the

blonde girl coldly. ‘We can’t possibly keep track of every single one. If I were you, I’d go back to Liverpool. I’m sure your brother will turn up eventually.

Now, if you’ll excuse me, I’ve got to close the kiosk.’ She began pulling down shutters enclosing the counter area.

‘Thanks for nothing,’ said Samantha, and turned away.

She went back to join Jamie on their bench. ‘I know there’s something funny going on,’ she muttered. ‘My brother’s vanished, and that lot know something about it.

Ben managed to cross the tarmac undetected and slipped cautiously inside the Chameleon Tours hangar. Just as before it was shadowed and gloomy, with something strangely sinister in the atmosphere.

Ben stood in the shadows by the doorway, looking round. Suddenly he spotted something new, a group of packing cases on the far side of the hangar. They were long and narrow. Coffin-shaped, thought Ben with a shiver. He moved slowly towards them.

The first lid he tried was fastened down tight. The second had not yet been fastened. Ben lifted it away, and found himself staring down at Polly. There was a white metal sheath on her arm. For one terrible moment he thought she was dead.

Then he realised that she was still alive, alive but somehow dormant. Drugged, he thought and dashed for the inner office.

There was a telephone on the desk and Ben snatched it up. ‘Hello? Who’s the man in charge of the airport? The Manager? Can you put me through to him, please? I want to speak to a friend of mine who should be with him right now...’

The Doctor of course had left the Manager some little time ago and was now back at the Chameleon Tours kiosk.

Jamie jumped up eagerly as he came in sight. ‘Doctor, this young lassie’s in some kind of trouble. Her brother’s missing...’

The Doctor gave Samantha a preoccupied smile and said, Just a minute, Jamie, I want to take a look at this kiosk. We’ve got to find some kind of proof before they catch us again.’

The kiosk was locked and shuttered but the Doctor’s sonic screwdriver

made short work of the lock and he hurried inside. Rummaging through the drawers of the desk in the inner office he found a pile of postcards from various foreign countries, and sheets of unused foreign stamps.

The Doctor sat at the desk for a moment, thinking hard.

There was a monitor set into the wall at eye-level. It was live, showing a general view of the crowds milling about on the concourse.

It seemed oddly purposeless, thought the Doctor. Why did they need a view of what was directly outside the door?

There was a model aeroplane on a stand on the desk, and guided by some instinct the Doctor caught the tail and pulled gently. The model plane clicked round to a different angle and the picture on the monitor changed. Now it showed a woman in a nurse's uniform checking over equipment in a room that looked part of some kind of medical centre.

Pleased with his new toy, the Doctor clicked the plane into a new position. This time the monitor showed Ben, talking urgently into a phone. Fascinated, the Doctor leaned forward. He could hear Ben's voice through some hidden speaker.

'Why didn't you listen to him?' Ben was saying. 'It was all true! I'm in the Chameleon Tours hangar now and I've just found a packing case with –'

A figure appeared behind Ben holding a small metallic device. He pointed it at the back of Ben's neck and suddenly Ben froze.

' *Ben*!' yelled the Doctor.

Frantically he fiddled with the plane, trying to establish communication. 'Ben, can you hear me?' He twiddled one of the engines of the model plane.

Hurriedly grabbing the phone from Ben's hand and slamming it down, Spencer slipped the metal device in his pocket.

Suddenly a voice came from a speaker: 'Ben, Ben, can you hear me?'

Spencer turned and dashed back into the inner room.

He looked up and saw the Doctor on a monitor screen.

Blade hurried through from the outer office. ‘That boy out there – who is he?’

Spencer pointed to the monitor screen. ‘A friend of the Doctor, it seems.’

As they watched, the Doctor jumped up and hurried away.

‘Did he see what happened to the boy?’ asked Blade.

Spencer shrugged. ‘He may have done.’

‘If he did he’ll be coming here. We’d better be ready for him. But first we’d better move the boy’s body.’

Ben was just returning to life as they hurried back into the office. Snatching out the freezer gun, Spencer restored him to immobility. Blade hurried to a corner of the hangar and came back with a wheelchair.

Putting down the pen device, Spencer helped Blade to lift Ben’s frozen body into the chair.

Detective Inspector Crossland was getting nowhere with his enquiries but he was a persistent man, and he knew that more cases are solved by sheer routine plodding than by Holmes-like flashes of inspiration.

He had reached Jenkins at Immigration Desk Number Five by now and was showing him a picture of an average-looking pleasant-faced young man. ‘His name’s Brian Briggs. Supposed to have come through here about a week ago.’

Jenkins shrugged. ‘Thousands of people come through this airport every week.’

‘Well, just a chance.’ Putting the picture away.

Crossland produced another one, a portrait of an older man. ‘What about this man?’

To Crossland’s surprise Jenkins said instantly, ‘Oh yes, I remember him. He had a security pass like you. Who is he?’

‘A colleague of mine, Detective Inspector Gascoigne.

Did he come back through your gate?’

‘Couldn’t tell you. We had a spot of bother recently, he could have slipped through then.’

‘What sort of bother?’

‘Two people arriving without passports. They told some sort of story about finding a dead body in a hangar. Turned out it was all a hoax.’

‘Are they in custody?’

‘No, they ran away. The airport police are still looking for them!’

‘What did they look like?’

Jenkins smiled. ‘One scruffy-looking little man in an old frock-coat, one Scots boy wearing a kilt!’

Crossland said thoughtfully, ‘Shouldn’t be too difficult to find....’ He moved away.

Jamie was getting worried.

About ten minutes ago the Doctor had shot out of the kiosk locking it behind him, and told Jamie he was going to the hangar to look for Ben and that Jamie was to wait where he was, keeping an eye on the kiosk, until they came back.

Samantha Briggs voiced Jamie’s fears: ‘Your friend’s been gone quite a while. Do you think we ought to go after him?’

Jamie shook his head. ‘He said to wait here, so we’ll do as he said—for a while anyway...’

Samantha said curiously, ‘Bit of a weirdo, isn’t he?’

‘Och, no,’ said Jamie indignantly. ‘I wish I had half his brains.’

‘You’re all right as you are,’ said Samantha, and moved a little closer on the bench.

Jamie looked alarmed.

An efficient-looking young woman marched up to the kiosk unlocked the door and took down the shutters. She went inside and switched on the lights.

‘They’re open again now,’ said Samantha.

Jamie nodded. ‘Aye, but where’s Polly?’

An announcement came over the public address system.

‘Chameleon Tours announce the departure of their Flight Number Four-One-Three to Zurich. Will all passengers please assemble at the Chameleon Tours kiosk...’

The Doctor had reached the Chameleon Tours hangar undetected and was busily searching the apparently deserted office. He found nothing at all suspicious – until he glanced at the desk and spotted the metallic pen-like device with which Ben’s assailant had frozen him.

The Doctor reached out and picked it up, examining it thoughtfully. He sat at the desk where Ben had been sitting when he was frozen. He glanced over his shoulder in the direction Ben’s attacker had appeared from and found himself staring at a section of office wall covered by bookcases.

The Doctor studied the wall for a moment, then muttered, ‘Packing cases! better check those packing cases.’

He hurried out into the hangar.

By now a sizeable crowd of teenagers had assembled round the Chameleon Tours kiosk. ‘My name is Ann Davidson,’

said the efficient young lady briskly, ‘and it gives me great pleasure to welcome you on behalf of Chameleon Tours.’

She began passing out stamped postcards and ball-point pens. ‘Now, I’m quite sure that the first thing you’ll do when you get to Switzerland is to write home to your parents...’

There were mock groans from her audience and Miss Davidson smiled. ‘However, just in case you find you’re too busy enjoying yourselves, Chameleon Tours have got postcards of Zurich all ready for you to write here. When you’ve written your cards, give them back to me and we’ll post them for you in Zurich.’ She smiled again.

‘Chameleon Tours take care of everything.’

With a bit of good humoured muttering and grumbling the teenagers began writing their cards.

One of them came to sit on the bench next to Samantha and Jamie.

Before he could start writing, Samantha leaned forwards and said, 'Do you mind?'

She plucked the card from his fingers and showed it to Jamie: 'See! A picture postcard of Zurich, stamped with a Swiss stamp, all ready to be posted from Switzerland.' She handed the postcard back with a dazzling smile.

'Aye, well, what about it?' said Jamie puzzled.

Samantha jabbed him in the ribs. 'Oh, you're a right one, you are. This could explain the postcard I got from my brother. It was posted in Rome all right, but that doesn't mean *he* posted it!'

Jamie stood up. 'Aye, I see. I'd better tell the Doctor about this!'

Samantha jumped up too. 'I'll come with you.' They started to move away, but suddenly a burly man with a heavy moustache was blocking their way. He was looking at Jamie.

'Just a moment, young man. I'm Detective-Inspector Crossland. I want a word with you.'

Using a screwdriver as an improvised wrench, the Doctor was struggling to get the lid off one of the packing cases, unaware that his activities were being watched on a monitor in the secret room.

He got the lid off the case at last and found himself looking at a body covered in a sheet.

He pulled the sheet from the face and examined the features of a middle-aged man, who looked vaguely familiar. (It was, in fact, Meadows, whom the Doctor had glimpsed briefly in Air Traffic Control.) Suddenly the Doctor heard a voice – a blurred distorted voice that sounded very like Ben. 'Quickly, Doctor, help me... I'm suffocating...'

The Doctor moved cautiously back towards the inner office. It might be a trap of course, but he dared not ignore it. If they had taken Ben prisoner and locked him in some inner compartment, and if Ben was choking from lack of air...

The Doctor moved into the office and the voice came again: 'Help... please, help me...'

The Doctor looked round puzzled. He had heard the voice quite

loudly, but there was no one there. Suddenly he spotted a panel sliding shut, high in the wall. A panel that had covered a loudspeaker. As the panel shut, another one slid open, revealing a nozzle. White vapour began hissing from the nozzle, and the Doctor whirled round and dashed for the door. But it was already shutting in his face. He shoved at it, but it was locked fast.

The Doctor turned back to the nozzle. Curious to the last, he held out his hand to test the vapour. It was icy cold.

As the Doctor snatched back his hand the room was already starting to spin around him. Shuddering convulsively, the Doctor slid to the ground...

7

The Abductors

The alien being that wore the face and body of Spencer smiled coldly as the Doctor fell gasping to the floor. How feeble these humans were, how easily overcome! But the smile faded as, instead of relapsing into unconsciousness, the Doctor staggered determinedly to his feet, grabbed a handkerchief from his pocket and lurched towards the gas-nozzle with the evident intention of blocking it.

Spencer watched incredulously as the Doctor wadded the handkerchief and rammed it into the nozzle aperture, reducing the flow of gas to a few stray wisps.

Again, Spencer smiled. He touched a control in front of him and a second, higher panel slid back, revealing another nozzle and soon the gas was once more hissing into the room.

A little woozily, the Doctor studied the second nozzle. It was too high to reach, but somehow he managed to drag a chair beneath it. Then, grabbing a duster from the desk, the Doctor began climbing on the chair.

Spencer studied the monitor, astonished at the little man's powers of resistance. What he failed to realise was that the Doctor, despite his appearance, was no more human than Spencer himself, and had extra-ordinary powers of resistance and recovery. Even now, Spencer wasn't really worried. There was a third gas-nozzle available, set at a quite inaccessible point in the ceiling.

Spencer was reaching for the control when suddenly the monitor

screen went blank. Irritably Spencer jabbed at its controls, but he was quite unable to bring it back to life.

Somehow it was quite unbearable not to know what was happening in the next room. Switching off the gas-flow Spencer opened the secret door and went through.

The first thing he saw was the Doctor's shirt-sleeved body, huddled by the overturned chair. A glance at the wall explained the failure of the monitor. The Doctor had obviously spotted the spy-camera projecting from the wall and had hung his coat over it. Presumably it was at this point that he had collapsed, overcome by the gas.

Spencer knelt by the Doctor's body, satisfying himself that he was really unconscious. He was in the process of lifting the body up to drag it away when something cold and metallic touched the back of his neck and he knew no more...

The Doctor bounded to his feet, slipping the pen-like freezing device into his pocket. He snatched his coat from the wall and dashed out of the office and through the hangar, past the crate with Meadows's frozen body and out onto the tarmac.

To Jamie's astonishment the police inspector hadn't dragged them off to a cell. Instead he had sat them down on a bench and questioned them. Samantha Briggs had insisted on telling him all about her missing brother, but it was Jamie's story that had interested Crossland most.

He had taken Jamie through it in detail, and apart from glossing over the circumstances of their arrival a little, Jamie had told him everything he had seen and heard.

Samantha obviously felt her problem was being pushed aside. 'What about my brother, Inspector?'

'I've got something more serious to look into first, Miss.

If this young man's telling the truth, a colleague of mine has been murdered.'

Suddenly Jamie spotted the Doctor hurrying across the concourse towards them. He jumped up. 'Hey, Doctor!

There's a man here wants to talk to you.'

The Doctor seemed both worried and preoccupied. ‘I’ve no time now, Jamie – who is it?’

Crossland held out his warrant card and the Doctor peered at it. ‘Detective-Inspector Crossland... I see, well, that’s different!’

‘I’ve told him everything that’s happened, Doctor,’ said Jamie.

Crossland produced a photograph. ‘Have you seen this man before?’

The Doctor studied the picture. ‘I’m afraid I have,’ he said sadly. ‘This is the man we found dead in the Chameleon Tours hangar...’

Spencer was just recovering from the effects of the freezer-gun when Blade strode into the hangar office. ‘Where is the Doctor?’

Spencer got slowly to his feet. ‘He escaped. His intelligence is far in advance of the other human beings.’

‘In advance of yours, perhaps.’ Blade looked at his watch. ‘I have to go, the Zurich flight is due for take-off.

You will stay here.’

‘For what purpose?’

‘To atone for your incompetence. The Doctor must die

– and you must arrange it.’

With infuriating methodical slowness, Crossland took the Doctor through his story, checking it against the account given by Jamie. When he was satisfied he had all the facts he said, ‘Very well, Doctor, we’ll go and see the Manager. I want him to hear your story.’

‘He’s already heard it,’ said the Doctor huffily. ‘It didn’t seem to make much of an impression on him last time!’

Crossland looked at the photograph one final time.

Gascoigne had been a long-standing colleague, and an old friend. Putting the picture away, Crossland said firmly,

‘This time, Doctor he’s going to believe you!’

The Doctor rose. ‘All right, if you say so. Jamie, you stay here and go on keeping an eye on that kiosk. I’ll be back as soon as I can.’

A little belatedly Crossland said, ‘Don’t worry about your brother, Miss Briggs. We’ll find him for you!’

The Doctor and Crossland hurried away.

Samantha gave Jamie a disgusted look. ‘A fat lot of good that Inspector’s going to be.’

‘Well, at least he believes us.’

‘Doesn’t mean he’s going to do anything, does it?’

Samantha jumped up. ‘I’m going to take a look around that Chameleon Tours hangar. They could be keeping my brother a prisoner there.’

Jamie got up too. ‘Not by yourself you’re not!’

‘Well, it would be better if I had someone with me…’

‘Aye, well,’ said Jamie uneasily. ‘If the Doctor hadn’t told me to watch the kiosk…’

‘Do you do everything he tells you?’

‘Och no, it’s not that, but the Doctor trusts me.’

‘All right then,’ said Samantha airily, ‘you stay here.’

She gave him a pathetic look. ‘After all, they can only murder me, can’t they? Ta-ra.’ She turned to go.

Jamie was torn. He hated the thought of letting the Doctor down, but it was against his chivalrous nature to let a young lady go unescorted into danger.

‘Aye, well,’ he said again. ‘I don’t suppose anything will happen at the kiosk for a bit, do you?’

Samantha glanced across at the shuttered kiosk. ‘No –

since they seem to have just closed it again. I mean, it doesn’t seem likely.’

‘And we won’t be long, will we?’

‘Depends what we find,’ said Samantha briskly. ‘Are you coming or

not?'

Jamie wasn't really used to bossy females and he wasn't equipped to handle them. 'Aye, well, I suppose I'd better.

In any case, you'll need me to show you the way!'

'All right, Doctor,' said the Commandant wearily. 'I suppose I must accept that you found a body. But I still want to know where you're from, and why you were trying to come through Immigration without a pass-port.'

The Doctor said, 'Surely that's unimportant beside the other things I have to tell you?'

'But you were breaking Airport regulations!'

Crossland said, 'Please, let him go on.'

The Commandant sighed. 'Very well, Doctor. Go ahead

– but make it brief!'

'I've just carried out a search of the Chameleon Tours office and hangar. I found another body, in a packing case, not dead but in some kind of suspended animation. A sort of coma.'

'And who was this man?'

The Doctor glanced round the busy Air Traffic Control Area. 'I'm not sure. But he looked very familiar. I have a feeling that he was one of your employees. He might even have worked in here!'

The Doctor noticed that one of the controllers was staring coldly at him, and turned hurriedly away. He moved closer to the Commandant, lowering his voice. 'Do you know what this is?'

The Commandant stared at the device in the Doctor's hand. 'Looks like a silver fountain pen to me.' Crossland took the object from the Doctor's hand and studied it. 'Me too.'

He went to press the button in the head, but the Doctor snatched the device back. 'Careful, Inspector, it's dangerous. Things aren't always what they seem, you see.

And Chameleon Tours aren't quite what they seem either.'

The Commandant looked baffled. ‘I take it you have some kind of theory, Doctor?’

‘Yes, but I don’t think you’ll believe it when you hear it.

Still, here goes! First, Inspector Gascoigne was murdered with some kind of electrical weapon, a ray gun you’d probably call it. A weapon that hasn’t been invented here on Earth.’

‘Now, really!’ snorted the Commandant. ‘A ray gun!’

Angrily the Doctor turned away. ‘There, you see, you don’t believe me, do you? What’s the use?’

Strange as his story was, Crossland found there was something oddly convincing about the little man’s evident sincerity. ‘Be patient, sir,’ he urged. ‘We’re trying to understand you.’

The Doctor drew a deep breath. ‘I believe Chameleon Tours to be merely a cover, a front, for the mass kidnapping of young people.’

The Commandant jumped to his feet. ‘And this is supposed to be taking place in my Airport?’

‘Yes – at this very moment!’

The Commandant turned to Crossland. ‘I think we’ve heard quite enough. Can’t you just take him away and lock him up somewhere?’

Crossland shook his head. ‘I’m sorry sir, but he doesn’t seem to have broken the law, apart from trespass and this immigration business, and that’s not really my concern at the moment.’

‘And what about the question of Brian Briggs?’

demanded the Doctor. ‘Are you concerned about him?’ He turned to the Commandant. ‘Brian Briggs is a young man who went on a Chameleon Tour and vanished –

kidnapped!’

‘We’re not sure of that,’ protested Crossland.

‘Well, he’s nowhere to be found, is he? And neither are two young friends of mine, Polly and Ben. And that, to my mind proves my point. Chameleon Tours specialises in abducting young people.’

‘And just where are all these young people being taken?’

asked the Commandant sarcastically.

‘I’m not sure, but I could make a very good guess. In view of the facts I’ve just presented, the use of a ray gun, this device I have here, it seems obvious to me that we are dealing with beings from another planet.’

‘That still doesn’t answer my question –’ began the Commandant, then broke off as he realised the full implications of the Doctor’s remark. ‘*What* did you say?’

‘I told you you wouldn’t believe me,’ said the Doctor sadly.

‘I should think not! Of all the arrant, absolute nonsense...’

Crossland too was sceptical. ‘That’s quite a theory, Doctor. I think you’ll need to produce some more evidence to support all this.’

‘Evidence?’ For a moment the Doctor was at a loss. He looked at the pen-like device still in his hand. ‘Well, there’s this of course.’

‘A pen!’ exploded the Commandant. ‘You call that evidence?’

The Doctor looked round. It was a quiet moment in Air Traffic Control and one of the operators had come back from the canteen with a tray of tea which he was passing out amongst his fellows.

The Doctor turned to the nearest controller, who had a steaming cup of tea in his hand. ‘Perhaps you’d be good enough to help me? Just hold your tea up in front of you.’

‘All right...’ The man held up the cup of tea and the Doctor pointed the pen-device at him.

The man’s face twisted with fear and he backed away.

The Doctor looked curiously at him. There was something familiar about the man’s face, and suddenly the Doctor realised – it was the face of the frozen body in the crate at the Chameleon hangar. ‘Perhaps you’ve seen one of these devices before?’

‘No, no I...’

Aiming not at the man but the cup of tea the Doctor pressed the firing button. The man gave a yell of fear, dropped the tea and turned and

fled from the room. Jean Rock had come up to see what was happening. Suddenly she pointed to the dropped cup of tea. 'Look!' The saucer had smashed but the cup had not. Moreover, it seemed to be still full of tea. Jean picked it up, giving a cry of surprise when she touched it. She held it out. 'Look' she said again.

The tea in the cup had turned to solid ice.

'Well,' said the Doctor quietly. 'Do you call that arrant nonsense?'

There was no one about at the Chameleon hangar when Samantha and Jamie arrived and they were able to begin their search without anyone trying to stop them. Jamie took the hangar, and Samantha the office.

Samantha searched through what seemed to be an endless pile of routine paperwork without success. Then leaving the desk she began searching the shelves. On the highest shelf she found a brown manilla envelope. She opened it and found it full of postcards. Samantha took one out at random and studied it. The front showed an idyllic woodland scene.

On the other side was an address in Leeds and a scrawled message: ' *Dear Mum and Dad, had a wonderful flight and arrived safely in the Black Forest. Will write again soon, love Tim. '*

Putting the envelope back, Samantha checked another postcard, and another and another. The big envelope was full of them, all bearing very similar messages.

Clutching it, she ran out into the hangar where she found Jamie prising the lid off a big crate. It was empty.

'Jamie, look what I've found!' she said excitedly and showed him the envelope. 'There must be about fifty postcards in here, all with messages like the one my brother sent. 'This should make that policeman do something!' The thought of her brother's unknown fate brought sudden tears to her eyes and she brushed them away with the back of her hand.

'You're a brave wee girl,' said Jamie awkwardly. 'Dina start greeting now.'

'Something in my eye,' said Samantha fiercely. 'Let's go and find that policeman.'

The Doctor's little demonstration had had its effect, and Crossland and the Commandant were studying the pencil-like device with new respect. 'We'll have our labs check it over,' Crossland was saying.

Jean Rock brought the Commandant a sheaf of papers.

'These are the Chameleon Tour flight plans the Doctor asked for.'

Suddenly the door was flung open and Samantha burst in, Jamie close behind her. She hurried over to the Doctor holding out the envelope. 'I've found these...'

'This is beyond the limit,' snapped the Commandant. 'I will not have my office invaded like this!'

The Doctor took the envelope and began studying the contents. 'Some of the further evidence you were asking for Inspector.' He spread the postcards out on the Commandants desk. 'Just as I thought. Cards to make the friends and relatives of the abducted young people think all was well – at least for a time!'

Crossland leafed through the postcards. 'Where did you find these, young lady?'

'In the office in the Chameleon hangar. Don't you see what this means? The Doctor's quite right!'

The Doctor was examining the big brown envelope.

'This is addressed to *Chamäleon Reisen* in Freiberg.'

Samantha said, 'They give these postcards out and get the kids to write to their people before they go. Then they send the cards abroad and get them posted back to Britain, so the parents think their children have arrived safely.

Doctor, what happens to them?'

Before the Doctor could answer, the Commandant said,

'This is all only supposition, you know.'

'To you, maybe,' flared Samantha. 'One of these missing kids happens to be my brother. And I got a postcard from him in Rome – a postcard just like one of these!' Samantha stared desperately around the little group. 'Can't you see, all of you? My brother hasn't just wandered off He's been kidnapped! And so have hundreds, maybe thousands of

others as well!'

8

The Secret Of The Chameleons

By now even the Commandant was beginning to be convinced.

'But why would anyone want to abduct all these young people?' he asked.

'If we knew that we wouldn't be standing here,' said the Doctor abstractedly. He had picked up the sheaf of Chameleon Tours flight schedules and was studying them absorbedly.

'Inspector,' said the Commandant, 'may I have a word with you?' He moved to a quite area of the room, beckoning the Inspector to follow him.

In a lowered voice the Commandant said, 'Can we really believe this Doctor fellow? He seems more than a little unbalanced to me.'

Crossland looked thoughtfully at the Doctor. 'He's certainly more than a little orthodox, sir. But all the same he's provided the only leads we've got on this case so far.

I'd be very grateful if you could arrange for him to have a free hand, at least for the time being.'

'A free hand?' repeated the Commandant faintly.

'Just to – poke around a little, sir.'

'Are you really suggesting I should let him run around loose in my Airport?'

'You can rely on me to keep an eye on him, sir.'

'All right, Inspector,' said the Commandant grimly.

'And on your own head be it!'

'I'm going to check on Chameleon Tours myself. I'll report back here if I discover anything; but meanwhile I'd be grateful if you'd just let them go on operating normally.

I don't want them to know they're suspected until I can act.'

‘Quite,’ said the Commandant despairingly. ‘Yes, quite!’

He went over to the Doctor. ‘I’m going to give you the freedom of my Airport for –’ He looked at the wall clock.

‘For twelve hours. After that I shall expect you back here with some real evidence.’

The Doctor put down the schedules and rose, looking at the clock. ‘Thank you very much,’ he said politely. In certain circumstances, the Doctor was thinking, twelve hours could seem like a very short time.

The Chameleon-Meadows was reporting to Spencer in the little room at the back of the Chameleon Tours kiosk. ‘I think he suspects me. He turned one of our own weapons on me – forced me to leave.’

‘You are a fool,’ said Spencer coldly. ‘You should have stayed. Now we do not know how much he has discovered, and whether or not he is believed.’

‘Even if he has discovered the secret of our mission here, they will not believe him,’ said Meadows in confident tones. ‘The minds of these Earth people will not stretch so far.’

‘Perhaps not,’ agreed Spencer. ‘The truth is probably beyond their intelligence. Except for the Doctor...’

‘I know where he is,’ Meadows pointed out matter-of-factly. ‘I could kill him.’

‘You are going to – but not at the risk of your own safety. We still need you in Air Traffic Control.’ Spencer opened a secret drawer in the desk and took out a round black device, the general size and shape of a button. He handed it to Meadows. ‘Take this and attach it to the Doctor. When we are ready I’ll activate it with this.’

Spencer took a small black box from the drawer and slipped it into his pocket. That will take care of the Doctor once and for all. And don’t delay. I want the Doctor dead before Captain Blade returns.’

The Doctor, Jamie and Samantha were waiting by Jean Rock’s desk while she filled out and stamped the passes the Commandant had rather grudgingly signed.

She looked up. ‘There you are, Doctor, passes for you and your friends.’ She handed them round.

‘Thank you,’ said the Doctor, wondering what he should do next. One of the controllers came over to him. ‘Excuse me, sir, my name’s Heslington. The Manager said you were to be kept informed about Chameleon flights, and there’s one coming in now.’

The Doctor followed him over to his console, and Heslington turned up the gain on a speaker. Blade’s voice came over the intercom: ‘Alpha Delta Sierra X-Ray Lima calling Airport Control.’

Meadows came over and stood by the technician at a console close by.

The Doctor turned to Jean Rock who was at his elbow.

‘How many flights a day do they run?’

‘Oh, seven or eight, I think.’

‘And how many aircraft do they have?’

‘Four. Why?’

The Doctor frowned. ‘Eight flights a day and four planes. Is that normal?’

‘They have a very quick turn-round, I know. But they’re only running short-haul trips to the holiday centres: Rome, the Black Forest, Athens, Spain...’

She went back to her desk and the Doctor stood studying the radar screen in front of him. ‘Which is the Chameleon plane?’ he asked.

Heslington indicated a blip. ‘There, sir. You can see it’s turning left. I’m going to hold it now till I can give it landing clearance.’

‘What’s the range of your radar?’

‘About a hundred and thirty miles, sir. Why?’

‘Oh, I was just wondering,’ said the Doctor airily.

‘When did this particular blip first appear do you know?’

‘No idea, sir. We only start to notice them when they call in.’ He spoke into his mike. ‘Airport to Alpha Delta Sierra X-Ray Lima. Climb to ten thousand feet and hold in control zone and await landing clearance..

‘How long do you keep a plane under observation after it goes out?’

asked the Doctor.

‘Once it’s clear of our control zone we’re finished with it.’

‘Then it could be almost anywhere,’ said the Doctor, almost to himself.

Unable to relax with the Doctor about, the Commandant came over. ‘Aren’t you wasting your twelve hours, Doctor, hanging about here disturbing my people?’

‘I don’t think I’ve wasted a single minute,’ said the Doctor cheerfully. ‘Still, if you insist, I’ll go.’ He turned to Jamie and Samantha. ‘Come on, you two!’

As he moved away, Meadows moved too. He bumped into the Doctor, gripped his shoulder to steady himself and managed to slip the button device beneath the lapel of the Doctor’s coat, where it dung, almost invisibly.

‘Sorry,’ said Meadows apologetically.

The Doctor was looking hard at him. ‘Haven’t I seen you before somewhere?’

‘I don’t think so.’

The Doctor smiled. ‘Perhaps you’ve got a double.’, Leaving Meadows looking distinctly uneasy, the Doctor led Samantha and Jamie away.

The Chameleon Tours kiosk was open again now, and Spencer was behind the desk. He looked up as Crossland approached. ‘Can I help you, sir?’

‘Are you the manager?’

‘Not really, I’m just looking after bookings.’ Crossland produced his warrant card. ‘I am a police officer, and I rather wanted to see someone in charge.’

‘You want Captain Blade then. He’s just landed one flight—he’s preparing to take off on another. He’ll be rather busy at the moment.’

‘Then perhaps I could go out to the plane.’

It was quite obvious that Crossland had no intention of being put off.

‘Just a moment, please,’ said Spencer, and disappeared into the back

of the kiosk.

He switched on a monitor and Blade's face appeared.

'Yes?'

'A policeman wants to see you!'

'Does he know anything?'

'I've no idea.'

Blade considered for a moment. 'All right, you'd better send him over to the plane. We'll deal with him here.'

This time the Doctor and Jamie were searching the Chameleon hangar office while Samantha went off to telephone to her worried parents.

Jamie stared at the wall, then gave the Doctor a disbelieving look. 'You're quite sure about all this, Doctor?'

'Now, Jamie, have you ever known me to be mistaken?'

'Aye, often,' said Jamie emphatically.

The Doctor gave him a reproachful look. 'Well, I assure you that that is the wall the gas-nozzles came out from!'

'Well, there's no sign of them now!'

'They've been cunningly concealed, that's why. Now, the man I froze appeared from – that way!' The Doctor pointed to his left.

'Another blank wall,' Jamie pointed out sceptically.

'Never mind. Somewhere in that wall there's a door and we've got to find it. For all we know, Polly and Ben could be back there.' The Doctor rubbed his hands together determinedly. 'We'll find that door if it means taking this place apart. You take that end, Jamie and I'll take this. And we'd better hurry. Inspector Crossland is keeping them occupied for the moment I expect, but I fear he's no match for them...'

Crossland was standing in the small empty first class section, just behind the flight deck. From the main section of the plane there came the low hum of chatter and occasionally a burst of laughter. The rest of the plane was full of excited young people.

Captain Blade was standing by the doorway to the flight deck with Ann Davidson, now in the uniform of a stewardess.

'I don't understand, Inspector,' Blade was saying. 'I assure you that our entire operation conforms to the highest international standards of air safety.'

'I'm sure it does,' said Crossland. 'My enquiries aren't concerned with air safety, but with a missing passenger on one of your Rights, and with Detective Inspector Gascoigne, last seen in your hangar. He is believed to have been murdered. I'm afraid I shall have to ask you to delay your flight while you answer some questions.'

'Yes, of course,' said Blade immediately. 'If you'll excuse me, I'll make the arrangements.'

He went through into the flight deck and Ann Davidson followed. Crossland waited for a minute or two, then suddenly became aware of a rising hum of engine noise.

They were about to take off!

Crossland hurried to the flight deck, threw open the door and stepped inside. 'Captain Blade –'

He broke off. Blade was waiting for him to one side of the door, a strangely-shaped pistol in his hand. With numbed astonishment, Crossland realised it must be some kind of ray gun.

Blade said, 'I wouldn't move if I were you. This is the weapon that disposed of your colleague, Inspector Gascoigne.'

'You killed him,' said Crossland dully.

'An unfortunate error. We have much better uses for you humans. Sit down there!' He gestured towards a chair at the rear of the flight deck.

Crossland sat, and immediately Ann Davidson operated a control in the back of the chair. Metal clamps slid out, fastening Crossland firmly in place.

Blade studied him. 'A fine robust specimen, don't you think, Miss Davidson?'

Ann Davidson said, 'Suitable for the Director himself, perhaps?'

'I don't know what you plan to do with me,' said Crossland defiantly.

‘But I warn you, British law has a very long arm.’

Blade smiled. ‘I very much doubt if it will reach where we’re going.’

The most intensive search had failed to reveal the inner door until at last the Doctor had realised that one of the box-files was hinged to the shelf it stood on. He pulled it upwards like a lever, and the secret door slid open.

The Doctor and Jamie hurried into the little control room and looked around.

The Doctor went to the corner cabinet and opened it.

There was nothing inside but a chair.

‘What’s that for?’ asked Jamie. ‘Who’d want to sit in there?’

The Doctor sniffed the atmosphere inside the little chamber. ‘Someone who isn’t completely used to the temperature and atmosphere of earth perhaps?

Fascinating!’

The Doctor looked at the monitor screens and began fiddling with their controls. One screen lit up, showing Spencer at the kiosk talking earnestly to a young traveller.

Another showed them a room holding some kind of medical equipment. ‘Some kind of hospital,’ said the Doctor thoughtfully. ‘We’re getting warm, Jamie – which is an improvement on my last visit here! Let’s go and see if there’s some kind of first aid place in the airport...’

Spencer had finished with his young traveller and was making a routine check of the office monitors. To his rage and astonishment, one of them showed the Doctor and Jamie leaving the hidden control room.

Angrily, Spencer took the black transmitter box from his pocket. On the monitor he could see the Doctor and Jamie in the office. He heard Jamie’s voice: ‘Should we put everything back as it was, Doctor?’

‘No time to bother with that. I want to find that medical room.’

They went out into the hangar, and Spencer picked them up on another monitor. As they reached the bottom of the steps he activated

the transmitter—and smiled as the Doctor suddenly staggered and collapsed...

Jamie looked on in horror as the Doctor writhed on the floor. He seemed to be pawing feebly at his lapel.

'Something.... here... Jamie,' he gasped. 'Off... whatever it is, *get it off*!'

It took Jamie a second or two to find the device behind the lapel. When he did, he snatched it away, giving a cry of pain as he hurled it from him. The device burned as though it was red hot.

The Doctor slumped back unconscious, white-faced and still...

Ann Davidson came back onto the flight deck. 'All set.'

Blade switched on a monitor above his head, and Crossland, still clamped helplessly in his chair, looked down the long central aisle, with row upon row of young passengers on either side. They sat docilely in their places, seat-belts fastened, waiting for take-off.

Blade turned to Crossland and smiled. 'You want to know the secret of Chameleon Tours, Inspector? See for yourself!'

Blade pulled a lever in the control panel in front of him.

Crossland stared at the monitor in unbelieving horror.

Suddenly the rows and rows of seats were empty.

The entire plane-load of passengers had disappeared.

9

Death Ray

Jamie knelt by the Doctor, desperately trying to revive him. He had just decided to give up and carry the Doctor somewhere he could get help when he became aware of someone standing over them.

It was Spencer, a ray gun in his hand. 'You're wasting your time. He's dead – and you're coming with me.'

Jamie shook his head. 'I'll no' leave the Doctor.'

'You have five seconds to change your mind.'

– ‘I’m not leaving him,’ growled Jamie.

‘Five seconds, I said,’ repeated Spencer. He raised the weapon.

‘You’ll have to shoot me then.’

Spencer began to count. ‘Five, four, three, two...’

To his great delight, Jamie saw Samantha coming through the door of the hangar. She took in the situation instantly, swung round to a pile of oil-cans by the door and gave the bottom of the cans a mighty kick.

The pile of cans fell with a tremendous clatter, and instinctively Spencer swung round – and Jamie jumped him.

With a wild, flailing blow he knocked the gun from Spencer’s hand. Spencer dived for it, but Samantha came sprinting up and kicked it away.

Jamie and Spencer grappled furiously and soon, for all Jamie’s youth and strength, he began getting the worst of it. Spencer had a strength that seemed more than human.

Samantha joined in the struggle, leaping on Spencer’s back from behind and winding her arms around his throat in a determined attempt to throttle him With a desperate effort, Spencer managed to free one hand from Jamie’s grip and plunge it into his pocket. The hand came out with a silvery pencil-like device and too late Jamie realised what it was.

Spencer aimed and fired and an icy chill blasted all consciousness from Jamie’s body. He slumped to the ground, and seconds later Samantha lay beside him.

Panting with effort, Spencer gazed down at his three defeated enemies. He went to the corner of the hangar, retrieved his ray gun, raised it and then lowered it again.

That would be too quick, too easy. These humans had dared to challenge him and almost to defeat him. The one called the Doctor had brought down upon him the icy lash of Blade’s contempt. They did not deserve an easy death.

Spencer thought for a moment, and then put the three bodies in a row, first Jamie, then Samantha, and then the Doctor. He went to a storage cupboard and produced a black metal case with a circular base and a

projecting lens.

It looked like some incredibly ancient camera, but was in fact an advanced automatic light-cannon. Spencer made careful adjustments to she control panel on the back, set up the device and switched it on.

A thin light beam shot from the lens. It was a few inches from the floor and a few feet to Jamie's left. Spencer touched the controls again and the beam began swinging round, very, very slowly, edging closer and closer towards Jamie.

Smiling cruelly, Spencer surveyed his handiwork. The beam would destroy anything and anyone it touched in its lateral sweep. First Jamie, then the girl, and then the Doctor would be consumed. The Doctor would be last, having seen his two young friends die agonising deaths.

Spencer turned and hurried from the hangar. If he had judged the effects of the freezing beam correctly, the humans would awake just in time to realise what was happening to them.

Still in a state of shock, Crossland watched uncomprehendingly as Ann Davidson took a large segmented container from a locker and went out into the main cabin.

'Where is this plane going to?' he asked.

Blade at the controls glanced briefly over his shoulder.

'You'll know soon enough.' As if reminded of something he flicked a control and spoke into a microphone. 'This is Plane Three to Base. Inform the Director I am bringing him a human original as ordered.'

In the hangar the three victims were recovering consciousness, but not their power of movement.

Jame,' croaked Samantha. 'How are you?'

'I'm all right—I think. And you?'

'I'm awake—but I can't move.'

Jamie tried to sit up and found that his limbs were held fast in icy paralysis. On the other side of Samantha a voice muttered, 'What's happening?'

'Doctor!' called Jamie. 'Are you all right?'

‘I think so—but I can’t move. Jamie, what’s that, just on your left?’

Samantha’s head was pointing in the right direction.

‘It’s some kind of a light beam,’ she said.

With a mighty effort Jamie managed to swivel his eyes round just a fraction. ‘Aye, I see it now. Doctor, it seems to be moving towards us!’

As they watched, the edge of the beam reached a little pile of wood shavings which burst into immediate flame.

‘That’s what’ll happen to us unless we move out of its way,’

said the Doctor.

‘But I canna move,’ said Jamie frantically. ‘Not an inch!’

‘What about you, Samantha?’ called the Doctor.

‘Neither can I.’ Samantha struggled frantically. ‘Wait a minute. I think I can move my hands, just a bit.’ Samantha managed to reach out and touch her handbag which had still been twined about her wrist when she fell. ‘But I still can’t move my legs or the rest of me, Doctor. I can’t move away! Isn’t there anything we can do to stop the beam?’

The Doctor was thinking furiously. ‘Have you got a mirror in that bag of yours?’

‘Yes, quite a big one.’

‘See if you can get it out,’ instructed the Doctor. ‘Jamie, can you use your hands yet?’

‘Aye, and my arms too, just a wee hit. The rest of me’s all froze though.’

Samantha had managed to get the mirror from her bag.

‘See if you can pass it to Jamie,’ order the Doctor.

Jamie made a mighty effort and managed to stretch his hands and forearms towards Samantha, while she reached out with the mirror. Jamie fumbled to take it, nearly letting it fall from his stiffened fingers.

‘Careful!’ called the Doctor.

‘It’s all right, I’ve got it,’ called Jamie. ‘Now what?’

‘Do you think you could point it towards the ray?’

‘I’ll try, Doctor. But why?’

‘If you can direct the beam straight back into the lens there’s a chance it’ll overload.’

Tightening his grip on the mirror Jamie began swinging it round towards the approaching beam.

‘Can’t you prop it up on something?’ said Samantha worriedly. ‘If that beam touches your hand...’

‘Aye, well I’ll have to risk that...’

The beam crept closer.

The second before it touched him Jamie thrust the mirror at a right angle to the source of the beam. He felt an instant’s searing pain, ignored it, adjusted the mirror a fraction – and the black metal transmitter exploded in flames.

Ironically, as soon as the danger was over the frozen trio began to feel life creeping back into their limbs. Slowly and painfully they began wriggling and stretching, struggling to get up.

Jamie managed to sit up first, his face streaming with sweat. ‘You don’t suppose they got rid of Polly and Ben like that, do you Doctor?’

‘No, I’m sure they didn’t. I think they were needed for some purpose. We were obviously considered too dangerous.’

Samantha was sitting up too. ‘But to do something like this, in broad daylight!’

‘I know,’ said the Doctor. ‘I’m afraid it means their plans must be nearly complete. We shall have to act fast if we’re to save Polly and Ben.’

‘And Brian,’ said Samantha. ‘Don’t forget him.’

‘If my guess is right, my dear, they’re all in the same place.’

‘And where’s that?’ asked Jamie clambering stiffly to his feet.

‘I’m not sure yet. We’ve got to find that medical room, Jamie, the one we saw on the monitor.’ The Doctor got up and looked down at Samantha. ‘Come on, you’re not going to sit there all day are you?’

The Doctor and Jamie helped Samantha to stand up and all three began moving a little stiffly towards the door.

The Doctor turned to Samantha. ‘Did you get a good look at that man, the one who tried to kill us?’ Samantha shuddered. ‘I should think so – I had my arms around his neck. Why?’

‘I want you to keep an eye on the Chameleon Tours kiosk and see if he goes in or out.’

‘All right!’

‘But be careful. Don’t let him see you.’

‘I’ll be careful. You two just look out for yourselves!’

They made their way back to the main concourse and then split up. As Samantha moved off towards the kiosk Jamie said, ‘That wee lass has got a lot of courage, Doctor!’

‘Almost too much, Jamie. I only hope she doesn’t try doing something too adventurous off her own bat!’ The Doctor looked round.

Just above their heads a sign read: *First Aid Station* with an arrow pointing below. ‘All we need now is a plan.

Jamie... You know, I don’t think you’re looking very well!’

Jenkins, the immigration officer on Desk Five had received a sudden mysterious summons to report to the First Aid Station. Within minutes of his arrival he had been frozen into unconsciousness and now the new Jenkins—the Chameleon ,Jenkins—was undergoing final tests from Nurse Pinto.

She studied the file in her hands.

‘Name?’

‘Steven Christopher. Jenkins.’

‘Where do you live?’

‘With my parents in Wimbledon.’ He reeled off an address.

‘Occupation?’

‘Immigration Officer –’

The interrogation broke off as the doors opened and an oddly-dressed little man came in, supporting a burly youth in a kilt. The younger man’s eyes were closed and he was breathing heavily.

‘Easy now,’ said the Doctor and lowered the wheezing Jamie into a chair. ‘Don’t overdo it,’ he hissed.

Nurse Pinto took Jenkins by the arm and led him hastily to the door. ‘If the medicine doesn’t help, come and see me again – later.’

She bustled Jenkins out and turned to the Doctor and his companion. ‘What’s the matter with this young man?’

she asked.

‘A rare tropical disease, Nurse. I’m his doctor. Help me get him onto a couch would you?’

Between them they managed to heave the protesting Jamie on to the couch. ‘If the attack doesn’t pass pretty soon he’ll need sommalin,’ said the Doctor importantly.

‘And we’d better find him somewhere more private to rest.’

Before Nurse Pinto could stop him he opened the door to the inner room. ‘What have we here?’

Nurse Pinto hurried forward and saw to her relief that the inert form of the real Jenkins was completely hidden behind its screen.

‘This will do nicely,’ said the Doctor. ‘Help me to settle the patient in here, would you, Nurse?’

‘I’m afraid we can’t put him in there, Doctor.’

‘Why not? It’s only an X-ray room, isn’t it? I see there’s a couch behind that screen.’

The Doctor tried to me forward again. but she barred his way. ‘I’m sorry’ she repeated. ‘You cannot take your patient in there, Doctor.’

‘You refuse to help him?’

‘It isn’t that, Doctor. I’ve got a seriously ill patient in there already, waiting for an X-ray.’

The Doctor realised that he had learned all he could for the moment. He went over to Jamie, made a pretence of examining him, and began heaving him off of the couch.

‘Fortunately my patient seems to be recovering,’ he said.

‘These attacks can sometimes pass off very rapidly. We’ll just have to see how he goes on. Come along, Jamie.’

In the rear of the Chameleon Tours kiosk, Spencer and Jenkins were watching all this activity on a monitor.

Spencer flicked it off as the Doctor and Jamie left the First Aid Post. ‘That man is a constant menace to our plans.’

Jenkins looked surprised. ‘Then we must kill him, surely?’

‘I tried, but they must have escaped.’

‘They will not escape me,’ said Jenkins.

He prepared to set off, but Spencer detained him. ‘No, wait. We shall certainly kill the Doctor, and his friends.

But this time we shall wait for them to come to us.’

10

Captured

Jean Rock looked up eagerly as the Doctor and Jamie came into Air Traffic Control. ‘Doctor, have you seen Inspector Crossland?’ she asked.

‘Not for some time. Why?’

‘Scotland Yard want to talk to him urgently and I can’t locate him. Your friend Miss Briggs was in here looking for him too.’

The Doctor turned to Jamie. ‘She’ll be at the kiosk.

You’d better go and join her, Jamie. She’s a very head-strong young woman, so see she doesn’t do anything silly.’

‘Aye, I’ll keep an eye on her.’ Jamie hurried away. The phone rang and jean Rock snatched it up, talking into it in a low voice as if she didn’t want to be overheard.

The Commandant shot her an irritated glance and said,

‘Crossland said something to me about checking upon Chameleon Tours.’

‘And now he’s disappeared.’ The Doctor didn’t seem surprised.

‘Still jumping to conclusions, Doctor?’

‘I don’t think so. Two friends of mine became involved with Chameleon Tours, and they disappeared as well...’

Jean Rock put down the phone and stood up, her face white and shocked. The Commandant stared at her.

‘Something the matter?’

‘I’ve found out what’s happening – about Chameleon Tours. I’ve been phoning all the airports that they fly to.

That was Athens, the last on the list. And what I’ve found out is this – Chameleon Tours never deliver any passengers.’

‘ *Never deliver*?’ said the Commandant stupidly.

‘It’s quite true, sir. The airports all say the same thing.

Zurich, Rome, Athens, all of them. Chameleon Tours pick up young passengers just as they do here, ostensibly to take them to other places. But none of Chameleon Tours’

passengers ever arrive – *anywhere*!’

The Commandant was horrified. ‘They must be taking these young people to some secret airfield.’

‘You’re still thinking in Earth terms,’ said the Doctor.

‘And I intend to go on doing so. What’s the name of the Chameleon Chief Pilot, Miss Rock?’

‘Captain Blade, sir:

‘When is his plane due back?’

Jean consulted a schedule. ‘In about half an hour.’

‘Right. After the turn-round we’ll simply have it followed.’

He snatched up the phone. ‘Get me RAF Manson, top priority.’

The Doctor took Jean Rock aside. ‘May I have a word with you?’

‘What is it, Doctor,’ she asked.

‘I suspect the Medical Centre is involved with all this, and I want to get in there to have a look around. But I need to get that nurse out of the way first...’

Samantha was at the kiosk counter, talking to Ann Davidson when Jamie arrived.

Catching her eye he sat down on their usual bench, and after a minute or two she came over to join him. She had a ticket in her hand.

Jamie shook his head. ‘Aye, well, the Doctor said you’d probably do something silly.’

Samantha’s eyes flashed angrily. ‘You’re not going to talk me out of this, Jamie. I’m leaving on the next flight, in about an hour’s time. Chameleon Tour to Rome. It’s the only way to find out what’s going on. I’ll come back and tell you all about it.’

‘ *If* you come back at all,’ said Jamie gloomily. ‘What makes you think you’ll find your brother in Rome?’

‘That’s where he was supposed to be going. At least I’ll be doing something.’

‘I wish the Doctor was here,’ said Jamie worriedly.

‘Maybe I’d better come with you.’

‘Now you’re talking,’ said Samantha eagerly. ‘Can you raise the lolly?’

‘The lolly?’

‘The brass, cash – the money. It only costs twenty-eight quid – pounds to you.’

‘Och, that’s a fortune. I’ve never seen so much money in my life. You wouldn’t let me go in your place?’

‘No,’ said Samantha firmly. She turned away. Jamie saw the ticket envelope sticking out from her bag. Stealthily he reached out for it. ‘It’s no job for a wee lassie –’

‘Wee lassie, indeed!’ Samantha swung round, nearly catching Jamie in the act.

Hurriedly he snatched back his hand. ‘Och, well, if you’re so determined I’d better just say goodbye then.’

Jamie lunged forwards and planted a clumsy kiss on Samantha’s cheek. Surprised and touched, she hugged him for a moment. ‘Oh, ‚Jamie!’ she said softly. ‘I can take care of myself, you know.’

‘Aye, I’m sure you can,’ said Jamie, as he slipped the ticket from her bag and concealed it under his jumper. ‘But I’d rather make sure for myself.’

Leaving a puzzled Samantha behind him, he hurried away.

The Commandant had done a lot of fast and high powered talking on the telephone and at last he had got his way. He slammed down the phone. ‘Well, that should settle it.

There’s going to be an RAF jet fighter on the tail of the next Chameleon flight out of here...’

Suddenly jean put a hand to her head and slid from her chair. Shocked, the Commandant snatched up the phone again. ‘Get me the Medical Centre...’

‘I’m really not supposed to leave here,’ said Nurse Pinto into the telephone. An angry voce blasted her from the other end and she said stiffly, ‘Very well, sir if you insist.’

She slammed down the phone, picked up a black medical bag and stormed out.

A few minutes later the door opened and the Doctor came in. He hurried over to the inner room.

Once inside, the Doctor stood looking around him. He went over to the machine that looked like an X-ray machine but wasn’t, and

examined it thoroughly.

He examined the couches and found a hidden control panel at the back of the head-rest. He touched the controls at random. A wall panel slid open revealing the body of Nurse Pinto – the *real* Nurse Pinto – frozen in immobility.

There was a white sheath clamped to her left forearm.

Deciding that it would be dangerous, perhaps fatal to awaken her with the link still in operation, the Doctor touched the control again and the panel closed.

A large cupboard was set into one wall. The Doctor tried the door, but it was locked. Proceeding on the assumption that anything locked away must be interesting, the Doctor produced his sonic screwdriver and set to work.

(Jenkins came into the outer room and saw the Doctor at work on the cupboard. Drawing a ray gun from his pocket he concealed himself behind the connecting door.) The Doctor got the big cupboard open without much difficulty and found that it contained neatly stacked piles of black and white sheaths.

He examined them thoughtfully. Then taking one of each colour he slipped them into his left and right hand coat pockets. Closing the cupboard he turned and left the room.

He hurried past Jenkins without seeing him. Jenkins trained his ray gun on the Doctor's back – and the outer doors opened admitting a worried looking middle-aged lady.

As the lady came in the Doctor realised there was someone behind him and turned in time to see Jenkins slipping the ray gun back in his pocket.

Before either Jenkins or the passenger could speak, the Doctor said hurriedly, 'I'm afraid I'm just going off duty, Madam, but my colleague here will attend to you.' And with that he disappeared through the outer doors.

As the Doctor came back into Air Traffic Control Nurse Pinto was saying, 'You really must see that your staff have regular meals, sir. If this young lady has missed breakfast *and* lunch it's no wonder she feels faint!'

‘I’ve never stopped her having lunch,’ protested the Commandant feebly.

Nurse Pinto closed her medical bag and marched out of the room, glaring suspiciously at the Doctor who was staring absorbedly at one of the radar screens.

As soon as she was gone, the Doctor hurried over to Jean Rock, who was lying back limply in her chair. ‘Well done! Very well done!’ he congratulated her. Jean Rock sat up, bright and alert again. ‘Did I give you enough time?’

she asked.

‘Ample time, my dear.’

The Commandant stared at her. ‘You weren’t ill at all, were you?’

‘It’s perfectly all right,’ said the Doctor cheerfully. ‘She was acting on my instructions.’ He produced the two sheaths. ‘Now what do you make of these, eh?’ The Commandant stared at them. ‘Nothing! What are they?’

‘I think there’s someone in this room who could tell us,’

said the Doctor. He looked across to Meadows’s usual station but it was occupied by someone else. ‘Where’s the man who usually sits there?’

‘Off duty,’ said the Commandant. ‘He’ll be back on shift in a couple of hours.’

‘Chameleon Youth Tours announce the departure of their flight number Four-One-Nine to Rome. All passengers should now be assembling in the departure lounge.’

Samantha put back all the contents of her bag, which had been spread out over the Chameleon Tours counter.

Ann Davidson came up to her. ‘You still haven’t found your ticket, then?’

‘I seem to have lost it. Still, you remember me, don’t you? I bought it off you.’

‘There are so many people... what was the name?’.

‘Briggs. Samantha Briggs.’

Ann Davidson studied her list. ‘An S. Briggs has already checked in.’

‘Can you remember what she looked like?’

‘It was a boy, I think. A Scots boy in a kilt.’

‘Jamie!’ said Samantha bitterly. ‘He’s a friend of mine, he must have stolen my ticket! We’ve got to get it back off him.’

As far as Ann Davidson was concerned, one teenager was as good as another. ‘I’m afraid I can’t hold up the flight,’ she began. Suddenly her desk phone rang. She picked it up and listened. ‘Yes, I see. All right, I’ll tell her.’

She put down the phone and turned to Samantha. ‘You’re going to be allowed on board after all, but our general manager wants to see you first. He’ll arrange your re-booking and sort things out.’

She pointed towards the rear of the kiosk.

‘Thanks a lot,’ said Samantha and hurried towards the little office.

As she came in, a man was studying a monitor screen.

‘You wanted to see me?’ said Samantha.

The man at the desk looked up. It was Spencer, the man who had tried to kill her, she realised, and there was a ray gun in his hand.

‘Yes indeed,’ he said triumpantly. ‘You won’t escape again!’

11

Spaceship

The Commandant was watching the blip that was Chameleon Flight Four-One-Nine on his radar screen.

‘When they take off this time they’ll have an RAF jet fighter on their tail!’ he said.

‘How high can a fighter plane go these days?’ asked the Doctor idly.

‘Oh, about ten miles.’

‘Futile,’ muttered the Doctor, ‘utterly futile.’

Jean Rock called, ‘RAF Manston on the line, sir.’

The Commandant hurried to the phone. ‘The Chameleon Rome flight is just about to takeoff. They’ll be on Amber One at flight level two-five...’ He glanced at the screen. ‘They’re taking off – now!’

On board the plane Jamie sat in an aisle seat, struggling to control his rebellious stomach. Sheer excitement had carried him on to the plane, but n realisation was beginning to hit him. Jamie was as brave as any man of his time, but flight, other than in the enclosed world of the TARDIS was just too much for him. Take-off had been a terrifying ordeal.

Ann Davidson came along and dumped a tray of airline food on the table of the seat next to him. She noticed his pallor. ‘Are you all right?’

‘Aye, I’ll be fine,’ muttered Jamie. He looked at the cheerful teenager tucking in next to him.

It was just too much. A hand to his mouth, Jamie sprinted for the toilets at the rear of the plane.

The Doctor and the Commandant were standing behind Heslington, studying the blip on his radar screen that represented the Chameleon plane in steady flight.

The Commandant pointed to the screen. ‘They’re just passing the fifty mile line now.’

The Doctor nodded. ‘And normally you wouldn’t be following them this long?’

‘Too much other traffic to control. Once a plane’s up and away on its air corridor, we’re finished with it.’

A voice crackled from the speaker: ‘This is RAF Two-Four-One. I have Chameleon plane in sight. Following at ten thousand feet, heading due south.’

The Commandant pointed to a smaller blip following the Chameleon one. ‘That’s him, there. Right on their tail.

So far so good!’

On the flight deck of the Chameleon plane everything was ready. Ann Davidson closed and sealed the door. ‘All set.’

Once again Blade pulled the lever, and once again the crowd of laughing chattering teenagers packing the rows of seats disappeared from the monitor screen.

Ann Davidson took the big, segmented container from its special compartment and prepared to go back into the main cabin, but Blade stopped her. He had been studying the radar screen. ‘Something’s following us,’ he said.

Blade flicked on a monitor and adjusted it to give a close-up head-on view of the pursuing plane. ‘It’s a fighter.

Give me a reading.’

Ann Davidson studied the instrument panel beneath the radar screen. ‘Two-three-seven-nine.’

Blade reached towards a separate instrument console, adjusted controls and then pressed a firing button.

In the cockpit of the fighter, the pilot felt a dazzling beam of light strike him squarely between the eyes.

He slumped forward, unconscious.

Slowly the fighter began its long nose-dive into the sea.

‘Look!’ said the Commandant suddenly. ‘The pursuit plane’s off course.’

‘Not just off course,’ said the Doctor. ‘Something’s happened to it.’

Heslington was speaking urgently into a mike. ‘Air-port Control to RAF Two-Four-One... Do you read me?’

‘I don’t think you’ll get an answer,’ said the Doctor sadly. He was quite right: the mike remained dead.

‘It’s dropping below our radar,’ said the Commandant in a puzzled voice.

‘There’s something wrong with the Chameleon plane too,’ said Heslington urgently.

The Doctor studied the blip. ‘It’s standing still!’

‘Impossible,’ snapped the Commandant.

Heslington studied the screen. ‘No, sir, he’s right. The blip’s absolutely stationary.’

‘That can only mean one thing,’ said the Commandant incredulously. ‘The plane’s going straight down...’

High above them the Chameleon plane was folding its wings into its body. The familiar aeroplane shape suddenly took on the sleeker lines of a space rocket...

On board the plane the first part of the conversion process was complete. Blade slid back a panel to reveal a second instrument console and began preparations for the final stages of the journey.

Ann Davidson was moving through the cabin gathering her incredible harvest when the intercom crackled. ‘Report to flight deck immediately.’

She went back to the flight deck and found Blade studying a file. ‘You have made an error in the passport list for the next flight,’ he said coldly. ‘Such carelessness is inexcusable. You will be punished. Carry on.’

Shaken, Ann returned to her duties. She walked back to the main cabin, looking for the next seat to resume the collection. It was an aisle seat, but it was empty.

Ann frowned. Had she already collected from it? Since the seat was empty she must have.

She moved on down the plane.

The seat about which she had been uncertain was Jamie’s...

Jean Rock put down her phone. ‘Negative report from Air Sea Rescue on Flight Four-One-Nine, sir.’

‘Impossible,’ muttered the Commandant. ‘A crash like that, there must be some trace...’

‘Nothing sir. They found the wreckage of the fighter, but there’s no sign of the Chameleon plane at all.’

‘What makes you so certain the Chameleon plane went into the sea?’ asked the Doctor gently.

The Commandant stared at him. ‘Because it’s just vanished from our radar screen!’

‘Ah, but it stood still first, didn’t it?’

‘It must have collided with the RAF plane...’

‘What makes you so sure?’

The Commandant snatched a note pad from his desk and drew a big circle, bisected by a horizontal line. ‘This is the radar umbrella, a hundred and thirty miles in all directions. Let’s say the Chameleon plane was here.’ He stabbed savagely at the pad. ‘The only way for it to seem to stand still would be if it had gone straight down.’

‘Ah yes,’ said the Doctor infuriatingly. ‘But wouldn’t it produce exactly the same effect if it had gone straight up?’

‘Don’t be ridiculous man,’ said the other wearily. ‘To get above our radar umbrella that way it would have to make a vertical climb of a hundred and thirty miles. It would be in outer space.’

‘Exactly!’ said the Doctor.

As they spoke the Chameleon spaceship was streaking upwards, Earth’s atmosphere left far behind.

Far above in the blackness of deep space there hung the giant gleaming sphere that was the Chameleon space station.

The spaceship sped towards it. The entry doors slid open and the space craft disappeared inside.

Flight Four-One-Nine had arrived.

12

The Traitor

The Chameleon space craft was now landed in the space station hangar, and Blade and Ann Davidson came out of the flight deck and headed for the exit door. Ann Davidson was carrying her large metal tray, which she had now fitted with a cover.

‘Should we have destroyed the plane they sent to follow us?’ she was asking as they moved down the aisle.

‘Why not?’ said Blade carelessly. ‘We can eliminate a squadron of their toy planes if we choose. As the Director says, the intelligence of Earth’s humans is less than that of our animals...’

From his hiding place in the galley, Jamie watched them leave the plane. His spell of sickness in the toilet had been followed by a bout of strange giddyness, which had passed, leaving him shaken but more or less back to normal. He had emerged to find that the plane had landed somewhere, and seemed to be empty.

As Blade and Ann vanished through the door, two more figures came on to the plane. Jamie got a quick glimpse of shapeless coveralls and equally shapeless blobby heads, then they turned in the other direction and moved away.

Swiftly and silently, Jamie followed Blade and Ann from the plane. He found himself in a long featureless metal corridor. Blade was nowhere in sight, but Ann Davidson was just disappearing around a corner. Jamie followed her.

Just around the corner there was an open door and Jamie peered inside. Ann Davidson seemed to be taking small objects from her tray and stowing them away in a series of metal filing drawers. As she finished her work, Jamie ducked back out of sight round the corner. He saw Ann come out of the store room and carry on in the other direction.

Moments later he heard voices behind him, coming nearer. He crept forwards and ducked into the little store room for refuge, closing the door behind him. Once inside, Jamie looked around curiously. There was little to see, just row upon row of metal drawers occupying every wall from floor to ceiling.

Jamie opened one at random, and gave a gasp of horror.

The compartment was divided into six moulded segments and in each one lay a doll-like shape.

But they were not dolls. They were living, breathing people, young humans, somehow miniaturised and made dormant. Hurriedly closing the drawer Jamie looked round the little room.

Hundreds of drawers, and, for all he knew, hundreds of store rooms

like this one... the sheer scale of it all was staggering.

The door slid open behind him and a voice said, ‘I was afraid I’d missed one of you.’

Ann Davidson was standing in the doorway, a ray gun in her hand. She stepped to one side. and two shapeless figures shambled into the room.

The Commandant said, ‘Yes, I see... thank you. I’m very sorry.’ He put down the phone. ‘Air Sea Rescue have just found the body of the RAF pilot. They think he’s been electrocuted.’

‘Do you still think these Chameleons are from Earth?’

asked the Doctor.

The Commandant sighed. ‘If only there was one solid bit of evidence, Doctor.’

The Doctor looked up as Meadows came into the room and took over his usual station. ‘I think it’s just come in!’

He nodded towards Meadows. ‘Do you mind if I question him? I think I know how to make him talk.’

Followed by the astonished Commandant, the Doctor went over to Meadows and tapped him on the shoulder. As Meadows swung round the Doctor took out the two sheaths, one black, one white from his coat pockets. ‘Do you know what these are?’

‘I’ve no idea what you’re talking about,’ was the reply.

‘Oh, I think you do,’ said the Doctor gently. His voice hardened: ‘Roll up your sleeve.’

Meadows turned to the Commandant. ‘Do I have to take orders from this man, sir?’

The Commandant said, ‘I think you’d better explain, Doctor. This man works for me and –’

‘Oh no, he doesn’t,’ interrupted the Doctor. ‘You just think he’s working for you! The entire personnel are being systematically replaced. This isn’t Meadows, he just looks like Meadows. He’s wearing one of these things on his arm.’

‘All right, Meadows,’ said the Commandant. ‘We’d better settle this now. Roll your sleeve up.’

Slowly Meadows began to obey – then stopped and made a dash for the door.

As he passed her, Jean Rock threw a chair in his path and he crashed to the ground.

‘Grab him!’ shouted the Commandant, and two astonished technicians lifted Meadows to his feet. ‘Put him in that chair,’ ordered the Commandant. ‘All right, Doctor, fire away!’

The Doctor nodded to one of the technicians. ‘Roll up his left sleeve, please,’ he said.

The half-dazed Meadows offered no resistance as the technician obeyed, and revealed the black sheath on the prisoners forearm.

The Doctor gripped Meadows’s wrist and studied the controls set into the sheath. ‘Suppose I alter some of these."

he asked.

‘No, don’t touch it.’ screamed Meadows, wrenching his arm away.

‘Eery well,’ said the Doctor quietly. ‘Now, you are going to answer all my questions. In return, I promise that no harm will come to you.’

Meadows nodded, utterly defeated.

‘Good,’ said the Doctor. ‘Now, where do your planes deliver your passengers?’

‘To a space station, about a hundred and fifty miles above Earth.’

‘And why are you abducting all these young people?’

‘We had a huge atomic explosion on our planet. It affected the genetic coding of our race in some strange way.

Our bodies tend to lose all individual identity, and the race is dying out.’

‘But what use are our young people to you?’ asked the Commandant. Meadows explained that the bodies of humans and his race were in some way compatible.

Chameleon scientists had devised a way of using strong young humans to transmit a kind of blueprint. By stealing their identities, the Chameleons were able to attain stability.

'How many of these young people do you plan to abduct?' asked the Doctor sternly.

'Fifty thousand.'

Even the Doctor was astonished. 'How big is this space station? Surely it would have to be immense?'

Meadows shook his head. 'The passengers are miniaturised on the journey. 'The plan is to restore them to normal size on our home planet and make use of them there.'

'And how many of your people are now working at the Airport in human form?'

'I don't know.'

The Doctor reached out as if to touch the sheath and Meadows screamed, 'I'm telling you the truth, I swear it.

Only our senior people know.'

The Doctor dropped his hand. 'What happens to the people whose identities are taken over, the originals?'

'They're somewhere in the Airport, but I don't know where exactly.'

'I'll have the whole place searched,' said the Commandant determinedly. 'We'll find them –'

'No,' shouted Meadows. 'You mustn't –' He became silent, as if realising he had given too much away, revealed some weakness.

'Any originals we find will have one of these on, won't they?' said the Doctor, brandishing a white sheath. 'And if we take it off, something terrible will happen to the linked Chameleon, is that it?'

Meadows closed his eyes. 'Yes,' he said wearily.

'What if you have to revert to your own form?'

'It can be done, but only with the use of the conversion machine.'

‘The machine in the Medical Centre?’ said the Doctor.

Meadows was talking quite freely now, all resistance gone. ‘None of us know where our originals are, you see.

Except the Nurse. She’s senior, and very cunning. She kept her original with her.’

‘Of course,’ said the Doctor suddenly. ‘I saw it myself!

We’ve got to get down there right away!’

Samantha Briggs lay strapped to the couch in the inner room of the medical centre, conscious but gagged.

She watched helplessly as Nurse Pinto checked her bonds then went through to the outer room.

In the outer room the Nurse opened a Red Cross cabinet on the wall, and pressed a concealed button, turning the back of the cabinet into a monitor screen.

Spencer’s face appeared, and his voice came faintly from a hidden speaker: ‘What is it?’

‘I still have the girl here. What am I to do with her?’

‘Keep her. She may be useful as an original.’

‘Surely we are bringing no more of our people to Earth –

’ She broke off, closing the cabinet door, as the Doctor came into the room.

The Nurse turned, her face impassive. ‘Can I help you?’

she asked.

The Doctor spoke over his shoulder. ‘Bring him in.’

The Doctor stepped aside and two policemen brought Meadows into the room.

‘I don’t understand,’ said the Nurse calmly. ‘Is this man ill?’

‘I think you two have something in common,’ said the Doctor. ‘Will you roll up your sleeves, please?’

‘Certainly not! What are you talking about?’

‘Officer!’ said the Doctor.

One of the policemen came forward and held Nurse Pinto’s wrist while the Doctor pushed back her sleeve revealing the black sheath. ‘I’ve seen all I need to see,’ said the Doctor. He took the silver freezer-pen that was clipped to her tunic ‘I think I’ll have this though, if you don’t mind! Now, as I remember, your original’s in there...’

As he headed for the inner room the Nurse shouted,

‘You can’t go in there!’

The Doctor ignored her. Turning to one policeman he said, ‘Keep an eye on her, will you?’ He turned to the other, indicating Meadows. ‘And you, bring him along, please.’

Samantha’s eyes lit up with joy as the Doctor hurried into the room, followed by Meadows and a policeman. The Doctor hurried over to her and unfastened her straps. ‘Are you all right?’

She struggled to a sitting position. ‘I think so – *ouch*!

Apart from pins and needles...’

‘You’re lucky it was no worse,’ said the Doctor. ‘Do you mind?’ He rolled up her left sleeve, but there was no sheath on her arm.

‘What are you doing?’ asked Samantha indignantly.

‘Just making sure!’ The Doctor turned to Meadows.

‘The Nurse’s original is behind that wall as I remember—

and the controls are in the head of the couch.’

‘That’s right.’ Meadows crossed to the couch and operated the controls. The panel slid back, revealing the upright figure of the real Nurse Pinto. Her left sleeve was pushed back and there was a white sheath on her forearm.

‘Flipping heck!’ said Samantha. ‘She’s out there as well!’

In the outer room, the Chameleon-Nurse Pinto was washing her hands at a basin, watched by the young constable.

She picked up a towel and began drying her hands. She turned, fumbling a little with the towel. Suddenly she dropped it, and there was a ray gun in her hand. She fired, and the policeman fell.

Immediately the Nurse headed for the inner room.

When she appeared in the doorway, Meadows was preparing to assist the unconscious Nurse Pinto from the cabinet. It was Samantha who saw the Chameleon-Nurse first.

'Look out!' she screamed and ducked.

But the Chameleon-Nurse was aiming at Meadows.

'Traitor!' she screamed.

Before she could fire, Meadows wrenched the white sheath from the real Nurse Pinto's forearm.

The result was extraordinary – and horrible.

The Chameleon-Nurse simply vanished, somehow *imploding*. In her place there remained only a congealing blob of protoplasm with a black sheath embedded in the centre. Beside it, in a crumpled heap was her uniform, with the ray gun close by...

13

Flight Into Peril

Nurse Pinto – the real Nurse Pinto – staggered from the cabinet, and Meadows caught her just in time. The Doctor helped him to get her onto the couch. 'Will there be any permanent damage?' he asked Meadows.

'Not to her,' he said grimly.

Nurse Pinto opened her eyes, looking round dazedly.

'You'll soon be all right,' said the Doctor reassuringly.

He noticed a stack of files on a nearby table, and picked one up, studying it absorbedly. 'Now, what are these files doing here...' he wondered.

He became aware that Samantha was tugging at his sleeve. 'Doctor, what do you think's happened to Jamie?'

‘What?’

‘He was nowhere near the kiosk last time I was there. I think he stole my ticket and went on the Rome flight in my place.’

The Doctor shook his head worriedly. ‘First Polly and Ben, and now Jamie. We really haven’t any time to lose...’

Jamie had been strapped firmly to a metal grille in the stock room and abandoned.

Immediately he was left alone he began struggling to get free, and he was still struggling furiously some time later when the door opened and Crossland appeared.

‘Inspector!’ said Jamie delightedly. ‘Am I glad to see you.’

‘Let’s see if we can get you loose,’ said Crossland and began working on the straps. ‘How did you get here?’

‘I stole someone’s ticket and came on the plane.’

‘But why weren’t you miniaturised on the way?’

‘Miniaturised?’

‘Made smaller, like all the youngsters in these compartments here.’ An idea seemed to strike him. ‘Didn’t you eat or drink anything?’

Jamie shook his head, ashamed. ‘No, I felt too ill!’

‘That explains it then. The food is drugged, it’s the first stage of the miniaturisation process?’

Jamie looked round. ‘Inspector, what is this place?

Where are we?’

‘On a space station, Jamie. The Doctor was right, these people are from another planet. Does anyone down there believe him yet?’

‘Och, I’m not sure. I doubt it.’

‘Surely the Doctor’s convinced them something is going on?’

‘Aye, well, I think the man in charge was beginning to –’

Jamie paused. ‘How did you manage to escape?’

‘There’s no escape from here, Jamie.’

‘But we’ve got to. The plane that brought us here goes back to Earth. We could stow away on it.’

‘The last plane to Earth has already left, Jamie. They’re just going back to pick up their own personnel.’

‘Then the Doctor will find a way to rescue us.’

‘Not this time, Jame. He’s up against a brain superior to his own, the brain of the one in charge of this whole operation. He’s called the Director.’

‘You seem to know a lot about him,’ said Jamie suspiciously.

Crossland smiled. ‘Of course I do, Jamie. I *am* the Director!’

Heslington was at his radar screen, the Commandant at his shoulder. The Commandant indicated a particular bearing.

‘That’s where the Chameleon plane vanished. I want to know the minute it reappears in the same spot. They have a flight due in very soon.’

‘Very good sir.’

The Commandant crossed over to the Doctor. ‘Now, what’s all this about personnel files?’

The Doctor patted a batch of files. ‘I discovered these in the Medical Centre. Files of twenty-five people who work here. My guess is they’ve all been replaced by Chameleons.’

‘I’ll have them all under arrest inside fifteen minutes!’

‘You’ll do no such thing,’ said the Doctor. He waved a schedule. ‘Look at this. Chameleon Tours’ last flight of the season goes in an hour’s time. And that’s exactly why none of these people must be arrested.’

‘Why ever not?’

‘Somewhere in outer space,’ said the Doctor impressively, ‘there are fifty thousand young people, three of my friends amongst them, and somehow we’ve got to get them back. I want to travel on that last

flight, and that means the Chameleons must believe that everything is still going according to plan.'

'Commandant?' called Heslington. 'The Chameleon blip has just reappeared and it's coming this way!'

'Keep tracking them.' The Commandant turned back to the Doctor.

'And how do you propose to get on their last flight?'

The Doctor beckoned to Meadows, who came over, trailed by his accompanying policeman. The Doctor looked up at him. 'Would it be possible for you to shed your Meadows identity and become someone else?'

'If necessary, yes. Some of our leaders have been processed several times.'

'Good,' said the Doctor happily. 'I shall pretend I'm a Chameleon impersonating me, and get on that way.'

The Commandant looked unconvinced. 'Even if you do get on their plane, Doctor, what do you hope to do then?'

'I won't know for sure till I get to their space station.

But when I do get there I shall have only one card to play –

a card that depends entirely on you!'

The Commandant looked alarmed. 'And what's that, Doctor?'

'You've got to find the originals of the people the Chameleons have taken over. We know they're somewhere on the Airport.'

'And then rip those sheath things off their arms?'

The Doctor shuddered. 'No, no, no! Find them, yes, but the last thing you must do is tamper with those sheaths.

Threatening to do that is the one thing I may be able to bargain with!'

'I see...' The Commandant rubbed his aching forehead.

'But I still don't see how you hope to get onto that plane, let alone convince them that you're one of their own people.'

‘It’s quite simple. I shall be a Chameleon that has been processed twice, once as Meadows here – and once as the Doctor. But carrying it off will depend entirely on the co-operation of Nurse Pinto.’

Confused and frightened as she was, Nurse Pinto was eager to help, and to take revenge on those who had stolen her identity. Before very long the Doctor lay stretched out on the couch in the inner room of the Medical Centre, giving a very good imitation of some-one who had just been processed.

He looked up at Nurse Pinto. ‘Is everything clear now?

You realise the risk I’m asking you to take?’

‘Of course,’ said Nurse Pinto calmly. ‘But we’ve got to think of those kidnapped young people.’

They fell silent as they heard someone coming into the outer room.

Seconds later Blade entered. At the sight of the Doctor, a ray gun appeared in his hand.

‘Don’t shoot,’ said Nurse Pinto hurriedly. ‘This is the one who was Meadows. He has been re-processed.’

Blade’s gun was still trained on the Doctor. ‘Why?’

‘The Doctor became suspicious of me in my Meadows form,’ said the Doctor calmly. ‘I was forced to kidnap him.

Since it seemed desirable to obtain possession of the Doctor’s brain – the rest is as you see.’

Blade nodded, apparently accepting the story and put away his gun. ‘The humans are suspicious. Their police are everywhere’

‘I suppose you’ll be taking use back to the space station?’ asked the Doctor casually.

Blade gave him a suspicious look. ‘I am taking everyone back on the next plane. Surely you had not forgotten?’

The Doctor nodded towards the machine. ‘Re-adjustment takes time, remember.’

Once again, Blade seemed satisfied. ‘Yes of course, I understand.’ He turned to Nurse Pinto. ‘Where is the Doctor’s original?’

‘Don’t worry, it’s in a safe place,’ said the Doctor hurriedly, hoping desperately that Blade wouldn’t ask to see it. ‘Tell me where the others are hidden and I’ll transfer it.’

‘Unnecessary. Because of the extra security we must abandon originals.’ Blade produced two passports from his briefcase, one for Nurse and one for the Doctor. ‘There is no time to change your passport picture now. Jenkins is one of us, he will get you through Immigration. We take off in fifteen minutes.’

Blade turned and strode away.

Nurse Pinto whispered, ‘Do you think we convinced him?’

‘I don’t know,’ said the Doctor thoughtfully. ‘But at least we shall be on that plane. Come on, we don’t want to miss it do we?’

They hurried away.

‘Security reports all Chameleon passengers now boarded,’

said Jean Rock. ‘This time the passengers were all adults, most of them identified as airport personnel.’

The Commandant nodded. ‘Did the Doctor get on?’

‘Yes, he was with Nurse Pinto.’

‘Chameleon plane requesting clearance for start up.’

‘Right,’ said the Commandant grimly. ‘Normal procedure, Heslington. Give them clearance.’

Heslington leaned forward. ‘Chameleon Three-Four-Five, stand by...’

Before very much longer they were watching the Chameleon blip on the screen. ‘You see, it’s stationary again,’ whispered the Commandant. ‘It must be ascending vertically.’ He went over to his phone.

‘The blip’s getting fainter, sir,’ reported Heslington. ‘It’s rising above our radar umbrella. Now, it’s just vanished!’

Once again, the Commandant was busy on the phone.

‘Superintendent Reynolds? Listen, I want every man on your force searching this airport. Time’s running out...’

In the Medical Centre, Samantha was watching Jean searching the files. She looked on for a while in silence and then asked, 'Any luck?'

Jean shook her head sadly. 'I wish my files were as neat as these. Look!'

She pulled open a drawer. It was empty. 'They must have taken lots of stuff with them. How did you get on at the kiosk office?'

'Nothing much. I found these behind a drawer.'

Samantha waved some crumpled carbons.

She passed them over to Jean who added them to her own finds. 'Right, we'd better take this lot back to control though what use it will be...'

When they handed the papers over the Commandant seemed to share her opinion. 'These don't tell us much.

Let's hope we find a clue somewhere else.'

'They must have hidden those originals somewhere we'd never think of,' said Jean gloomily.

'Then we've just got to think of it,' said the Commandant fiercely. 'The Doctor's relying on us.

Thousands of lives depend on our finding those originals –

and quickly!'

There were only a very few passengers on the Chameleon plane this trip, most of them in the uniforms of airport staff.

The Doctor and Nurse Pinto sat side by side in an empty row just a little apart from the others. 'How much longer?' whispered the Nurse.

'I'm not sure,' said the Doctor. 'I should imagine we're almost there by now.'

The illusion of normal flight had been amazingly well maintained, thought the Doctor. But he had felt the vibration as the wings folded back and sensed the gyro-mechanisms operating as they compensated for the angle of the cabin.

But the Doctor hadn't been fooled. Outside the cabin windows was not

Earth's atmosphere but outer space Suddenly the windows went dark as a vast metal shape loomed before them, and then seemed to swallow them up...

The lights came on and the Doctor patted Nurse Pinto's arm reassuringly. 'I think we've arrived!'

The plane came to a sudden stop, and seconds later Blade appeared at the head of the aisle. 'Owing to the success of our operation, the living space in the station is in short supply. Quarters will therefore have to be shared. Report to the accommodation centre for instructions.'

'What do we do now?' asked Nurse Pinto.

'We'll just follow the others – for the moment...'

Jamie sat upright in a metal chair, a bank of complex equipment close by. Crossland stood over him. 'Your name?'

A croak came from Jamie's throat.

Crossland adjusted controls and said again Name?'

'Jamie. James Robert McCrimmon.'

'Where do you come from?'

'From Scotland.'

Blade came into the room. 'Director, we have two imposters on the station, the-Doctor and Nurse Pinto. I allowed them to think they had deceived me. My intention is to have them destroyed.'

'One moment,' said Crossland. He turned to the newly-created Chameleon-Jamie and asked, 'What do you know of the Doctor?'

'He does not belong to Earth or to this time,' said Jamie.

'He has great knowledge, far greater than ours.'

'This man is a danger to us,' said Blade angrily. 'He must he destroyed.'

'And I say he must live – as one of us.'

'You will regret this, Director!'

Crossland stared coldly at him. ‘You have your orders, Captain Blade.’

Blade turned and marched angrily from the room.

As the little group of passengers moved along the corridor, the Doctor and Nurse Pinto deliberately allowed themselves to fall behind.

‘What are we going to do now, Doctor?’ asked the Nurse.

‘Slip away and see if we can find those young people.

This way: The Doctor turned a corner and found himself facing Blade. ‘Ah, Captain Blade,’ said the Doctor cheerfully. ‘We were just following instructions, reporting to the accommodation centre.’

Blade gave him one of his unpleasant smiles. ‘I shouldn’t bother, Doctor. You see, my instructions don’t apply to you. You will have no need for living space.’

The Doctor turned to run, but suddenly he was surrounded by the shambling featureless forms of unprocessed Chameleons...

14

The Bluff

Since escape was clearly impossible, the Doctor fell back on indignation. ‘I don’t understand, Captain Blade. We’re all here to stay, aren’t we?’

‘You’re here to stay, Doctor – but not in your present form,’ said Blade. ‘Did you really think that charade at the Medical Centre fooled me? You’re both still human. We want your brain, Doctor. That’s why we allowed you to come here.’

Blade gestured to the Chameleon guards, and the Doctor and Nurse Pinto were marched away.

Meadows sat in a chair in Air Traffic Control, with the burly form of Superintendent Reynolds looming over him.

‘You’re wasting your time with me,’ said Meadows wearily. ‘I just don’t know where the originals are.’

Reynolds turned to the Manager. ‘I think he’s telling the truth, sir.’

‘I think so too,’ said the Commandant wearily. ‘He’d have told the

Doctor if he'd known anything.' Reynolds beckoned a waiting constable. 'All right, get him out of here.'

Reynolds joined the Commandant, who was staring broodingly at a wall map of the Airport. 'They most be here somewhere.'

'I've got fifty men searching,' said Reynolds. 'I've asked the Metropolitan Police for more men. But I need still more help. We must ask for volunteers...'

A few minutes later the Commandant's familiar voice rang out from every public address speaker on the Airport.

'I am asking all available Airport personnel to volunteer for special duty. Please report to the Airport Police who will issue instructions. We wish to apologise to all passengers for the temporary suspension of all outward flights... There is no call for alarm...'

Even as he spoke the police, joined by increasing numbers of volunteers, were searching hangars and runways and outbuildings and shops and offices, not to mention large areas of waste ground. But the Airport was enormous and the searchers still too few...

The Director's office was one of the larger rooms on the space station, its walls lined with complex scientific instruments. The Doctor noticed uneasily that one section looked very like the set-up in the Medical Centre: twin couches linked by complex instrumentation.

From his command chair Crossland swung round to face the Doctor. 'What did you hope to achieve by coming here?' he asked.

The Doctor stared fearlessly back at him. 'A chance to plead with you for the lives of thousands of young people.'

Crossland looked surprised. 'They are only human beings after all, Doctor?'

'And what are you?'

'The most intelligent race in the universe,' said Crossland arrogantly.

Glancing round, the Doctor was delighted to see a familiar figure at one of the communications consoles.

'Jamie!' he called.

The figure swung round. 'You spoke to me."

‘Not really,’ said the Doctor sadly. ‘You’re not really Jamie, are you? You’re a Chameleon.’ He looked reproachfully at Crossland. ‘You’ve lost his Scots accent in the processing; I much preferred the original.’

Crossland smiled. ‘Your friend’s original is safe enough, Doctor, and not very far from here.’ He called to the Chameleon Jamie ‘Who are we waiting for now?’

‘Dubrovnik and Athens have still to collect personnel.’

‘We are ahead of schedule. We can wait.’ He nodded to Blade who stood just behind the Doctor. ‘My congratulations, Captain Blade, for bringing the Doctor here. I shall personally decide who is to take over his identity.’

‘One of your little group of friends, no doubt!’ He turned to Nurse Pinto and said loudly, ‘It’s the same everywhere. The special people up here are secure because they have their originals actually on the space station.’ The Doctor looked mockingly at Blade. ‘Your Director is safe because the real Inspector Crossland is here. But where’s your original, Captain Blade?’ He nodded to Spencer who stood by the door. ‘And where’s yours?’

‘Their originals are perfectly safe at the Airport,’

snapped Crossland. ‘In some four of your weeks the life-force will have been drained from the human bodies, and the processing will be permanent. After that the bodies will die.’ The Director strode angrily from the room.

The Doctor went on talking to Nurse Pinto, though his words were really addressed to Blade and Spencer. ‘Yes, the Director and his friends are safe enough – like the one who’s taken over Jamie. But the lower ranks, like these two, were forced to leave their originals behind. If those originals are tampered with, they’re finished!’

‘He’s talking nonsense,’ snarled Blade. ‘Let’s get him into the machine.’

As Blade and Spencer closed in on him the Doctor said loudly, ‘You’d better process me quickly, because any moment now you’ll cease to exist. You’re first on the list!’

Blade paused. ‘What list?’

‘We found all the originals at the Airport. They’re going to start deprocessing them one by one, starting with you, unless I send a

message to stop them.'

'You're bluffing,' said Spencer uneasily. 'Where did you find these originals?'

The Doctor waved this detail aside. 'That I can't tell you. But just as I got on your plane I got a signal to say the search had been successful. Otherwise, I wouldn't have come.'

Blade and Spencer looked at each other uneasily.

'If you don't believe me, check with the Airport,'

suggested the Doctor. 'I imagine you know the frequency.'

'They could even have been buried,' said the Commandant gloomily.

Reynolds pointed to the map. 'I've got two dozen men in this area looking for signs of disturbed ground. Twenty policemen with fifty of your volunteers are going through these hangars...'

Heslington looked up, taking off his headphones.

'Someone's crashing in on our frequency sir. They're asking for you.' He turned up the volume on a speaker and a distorted voice crackled into the room: 'Chameleon Headquarters calling Airport. We understand you have found certain property in which we have an interest. Can you confirm?'

The Commandant came over to the mike: 'Yes, we have the property.'

'State where you found it,' demanded the voice.

The Commandant said, 'That is not important. We have found it and we can destroy many of you.' He covered the mike with his hand. 'The Doctor must be trying to run a bluff.'

Reynolds nodded. 'I'm afraid we're not being much help to him.'

Samantha and Jean were searching frantically through the office in the Chameleon kiosk. Samantha had recollected finding a crumpled list. At the time she had discarded it as unimportant, but she had suddenly become convinced that it might be very important indeed.

'What did you do with it?' asked Jean.

'I just dumped it down here somewhere. Samantha was groping in the

space behind a filing cabinet.

Suddenly she straightened up. ‘Here it is!’ She held out a list of vehicle registration numbers. ‘It suddenly dawned on me – why would they need so many cars? There’s twenty-five of them, twenty-five numbers for twenty-five people!’

‘Why are you reluctant to disclose where the property was found?’ demanded the Chameleon voice.

‘It’s not a question of reluctance,’ said the Commandant unconvincingly.

‘Tell him we haven’t told you yet,’ hissed Reynolds.

‘The property is in the hands of the police,’ said the Commandant. ‘They have not as yet informed me of the hiding place.’ It sounded feeble as he was saying it, and it was received with discouraging silence.

The phone rang and Reynolds snatched it up. After a minute he said, It’s that assistant of yours, and that other girl. They say they’ve found a vital clue…’

‘Right, I’ll try and stall…’

But even as the Commandant spoke the Chameleon voice said, ‘There is no point in this discussion. We are closing down.’

On the space station the Director had returned to his office, and Blade was trying to justify the delay in processing the Doctor. ‘He said they had found our originals.’

‘And had they?’ The Director looked round the crowded room.

‘No. It seems they were bluffing.’

‘Proceed with the processing,’ ordered the Director.

‘And in future, obey my orders more promptly: And that means all of you!’

The Doctor was taken over to the Director’s command chair. ‘You lot had better brace yourselves,’ he said chattily, ‘You’re going to get a nasty surprise when twenty-five of your people suddenly disintegrate!’

‘What a pity you won’t be able to see it,’ said Crossland with mock

pleasantness. He touched a control and a section of wall slid back revealing two pairs of metallic throne-like chairs, each linked by a control console. ‘A twin processing unit, Doctor. We can deal with you and Nurse Pinto at the same time. Each of you will sit in one chair, and in the other will sit the one of us chosen to take over your personality.

The Doctor strolled over to one of the set-ups and investigated it with interest. He turned, leaning casually against one of the linking consoles. ‘Tell me, Captain Blade, will I be harmed if you disintegrate halfway through my processing? I’d hate to be left neither one nor the other, so to speak...’

As he rattled on the Doctor’s hands were busy with his sonic screwdriver behind his back. Another thrust and twist...

‘Sit down,’ ordered Blade.

‘Oh, very well,’ said the Doctor. Suddenly there came a very satisfying bang and flash from the console behind him. The Doctor jumped back, palming the sonic screwdriver and slipping it back in his pocket. ‘Oh dear, oh dear, what’s happened now?’

The Director glared angrily at Blade. ‘You should have watched him more closely. Bring another unit. And you, Doctor, please stand well away from the console this time.

You have postponed your fate – not prevented it.’

In the Airport’s huge crowded car park Samantha and Jane Rock were checking car numbers one by one. Perhaps foolishly, they had decided to test their theory alone rather than ask for help.

Neither of them noticed that Meadows was stalking them between the cars. By shamming defeated helplessness, he had managed to trip up and then elude his guarding constable.

Purely by chance he had crossed paths with the two girls and immediately some instinct told him what they were doing. He began working his way closer to them...

All too soon Blade and Spencer had installed the new console and checked it over.

Blade straightened up: ‘Ready, Director.’

‘At last,’ said Crossland. ‘And now, Doctor...’ He pointed sternly.

‘If you’re sure it’s safe now,’ grumbled the Doctor. He sat down and was soon clamped firmly in place, next to Nurse Pinto who had been fixed into her chair for some time.

At a sign from the Director, two unprocessed Chameleons shambled forwards and took their places in the two vacant chairs. The Doctor looked at the formless blobs of head, and shuddered to think of one of them taking on his likeness.

Blade and Spencer began attaching the familiar black sheaths to the arms of the two Chameleons...

Suddenly Samantha jumped up ‘I’ve found one!’ she yelled.

She had found one of the numbers on her list and there in the back, half hidden under a blanket was the dormant original of Immigration Officer Jenkins.

Suddenly Meadows seemed to spring out from nowhere.

With a snarl he leaped on Samantha and threw her to the ground...

By now the Director’s big office was very crowded. It was rather like being the star of a public execution, thought the Doctor. Most of the Chameleon airport personnel had turned up, drawn perhaps by the rumours of some threat to their precious abandoned originals. Jenkins had appeared and was making final adjustments to the wiring...

‘Are you ready?’ called the Director impatiently. ‘Nearly sir,’ said Jenkins. He made a final adjustment and stood up. Before he could speak the Chameleon-Jamie called out from the communications console: ‘The Airport are trying to contact us again. sir.’

‘Ignore them,’ snapped the Director.

‘They claim to have found the originals.’

‘Ignore them!’

A murmur of protest ran around the room, but the Director ignored it. He looked at the Doctor and Nurse Pinto strapped into their chairs, and at the waiting Chameleons, soon to take over their forms.

He raised his hand in command. ‘Process them!’

15

The Deal

The Commandant and Reynolds were standing behind Heslington, who was speaking into his mike in a loud, urgent voice. ‘Airport Control to Chameleon HQ. Do you read me?’

He looked up despairingly. ‘It’s no good sir. I’m pretty sure they’re getting our signal, but they’re just not answering.’

‘Then we’ll have to give them a demonstration,’ said the Commandant grimly. He went to his desk where the phone lay off the hook. ‘Still there, Sergeant Erskine? Good. Now listen carefully...’

In the car park police were laying out a long row of bodies on blankets. They had managed to catch up with Meadows who had just been taken away. Samantha was young and strong and very angry, and Jean Rock had come to help her in her fight. By the time the policeman hunting Meadows had arrived, the fugitive had been pretty well subdued.

The policeman had summoned others, and soon all the missing originals had been found and taken from the cars.

Now they were awaiting ambulances and hospitalisation.

Sergeant Erskine walked to the beginning of the line and knelt by Jenkins, the first original to be found. A little dubiously he pushed back the left sleeve revealing the white sheath.

Obeying the Commandant’s instructions he reached out and wrenched it off...

Where Jenkins had been standing in the Director’s office on the space station there was a pile of clothes, a blob of protoplasm, and a black sheath.

Blade snatched it up and thrust it accusingly into the Director’s face. ‘It seems they weren’t bluffing!’ he said.

‘His linking apparatus could have malfunctioned,’ said the Director coolly.

Blade brandished the sheath. ‘Then tell me what’s wrong with it!’

‘That is a matter for our scientists.’

‘And by the time they’ve discovered there’s nothing wrong with it you lot will all have been disintegrated,’ said the Doctor loudly. ‘Except for the Director and his friends, of course. They’ll be all right, their originals are here.’

‘Be quiet,’ shouted the Director. ‘This does not concern you.’

‘You’re quite right, it doesn’t,’ said the Doctor. ‘But it very much concerns these others, doesn’t it? I won’t say another word.’

Blade swung round to the Chameleon-Jamie. ‘Contact the Airport.’

‘We have finished with that Airport,’ screamed the Director.

‘And if they haven’t finished with us?’ asked Blade.

‘Then the fault is yours. When we were forced to leave the originals you assured me they were hidden where they would not be found till the process was complete and the life had been drained from them. Are you now telling me that you were wrong?’

Blade had had enough debate. Suddenly there was a ray gun in his hand, trained on the Director. ‘Tell him to contact the Airport.’

Instead the Director shouted, ‘Destroy the transmitter.’

Before Jamie could obey he was covered by Spencer’s ray gun. ‘Call them—now!’ ordered Blade The Chameleon voice crackled from the speaker: ‘Where did you find the originals?’

‘They were discovered in our car park,’ said the Commandant. ‘All of them. We have already eliminated one of you. Unless I hear the Doctor’s voice immediately, the next will be Captain Blade.’

Blade turned to Crossland. ‘Release him!’

Crossland hesitated and Blade thrust the gun into his face. ‘I said release him.’

Crossland went over to the Doctor and began unfastening the clamps. As the Doctor stood up stiffly, Blade snapped, ‘Get to that microphone Doctor!’

‘When you release the Nurse.’

Hurriedly Nurse Pinto was freed.

The Commandant's voice came from the speaker: 'I repeat. Unless I speak to the Doctor immediately, the next to be destroyed will be Captain Blade.'

'The microphone, Doctor,' said Blade, almost pleadingly.

The Doctor crossed to the microphone. 'This is the Doctor speaking – I am quite unharmed. Please stand by while I negotiate.' He turned to Crossland. 'These are my terms. I will guarantee your continued existence only on condition that you return to Earth all the young people you have abducted.'

'Impossible,' said Crossland. 'They've all been miniaturised. To return them would be useless.'

'Reverse the process,' ordered the Doctor.

'That too is impossible,' said Crossland. 'The only equipment to do that is on our home planet.'

'He's lying,' said Blade harshly. 'The planes are the miniaturisation chambers. The process works both ways.'

He looked thoughtfully at the Doctor. 'What sort of existence would we have?'

'You would have to revert to your original existence, I'm afraid. Your scientists will have to find some other way out of your dilemma.'

It took Blade only a moment to consider. 'It is better than death, Doctor. I accept.'

Spencer nodded. 'And so do I.' There was a murmur of assent from the others.

'You fools,' screamed Crossland. He ran for the door, and Blade raised his gun.

Loyal to his Director, the Chameleon Jamie shouted,

'Look out!' and sprang forwards, trying to protect him.

Ruthlessly Blade shot them both down.

Stepping over the bodies the Doctor went to the microphone. 'This is the Doctor again. I have concluded my negotiations.' Briefly he explained what had happened.

The Commandant's voice came back: 'Very well. We shall leave those we found in the car park as they are till you return safely.'

'Please keep listening out for further messages,' said the Doctor. 'Captain Blade is in charge here now.'

There was concern in the Commandant's voice. 'Can you trust him Doctor?'

'Oh yes, I think we can – now.'

Stepping away from the microphone the Doctor went over to Blade. 'Now the first thing I want from you is to see the real Crossland and the real Jamie!'

A few minutes later the Doctor was standing in front of Jamie who was standing in an alcove in a neighbouring room as if asleep on his feet.

The Doctor took the white sheath from his arm and after a moment Jamie opened his eyes. 'Doctor?' His voice was sleepy and puzzled.

'Nice to see you alive again, Jamie!' beamed the Doctor.

'What do you mean?'

'Never mind, I'll tell you all about it later. Well, come on, out you come. You look like a sentry in there!' The Doctor helped Jamie out and sat him in a chair, and then went to attend to Crossland in an adjoining alcove.

He heard a yell of alarm from Jamie, and saw that he was reacting to the sight of Blade in the doorway. 'It's all right, Jamie, he's a friend now – sort of. Anyway, it's all over.'

The Doctor set to work restoring Crossland to life.

Some time later they were all assembled in the Director's office once more.

'The first plane is ready to leave, Doctor,' said Blade.

'We have all the processed personnel aboard, and your three young friends. Are you going with us?'

The Doctor nodded. 'Yes, I shall return with Nurse Pinto.' He turned to Crossland, the real Crossland this time and not his Chameleon double.

‘What about you?’ he asked.

‘I’d better stay for a while, and help to get things sorted out. If you’re ready, I’ll see you to the plane.’

As Crossland escorted the still-shaken Nurse Pinto to the plane, Blade turned to the Doctor. ‘What will the future be for my people, Doctor?’

‘What you make of it. Provided you keep your side of our bargain you will eventually be able to return to your own planet unharmed. The scientists most devise some other solution – one that doesn’t involve the kidnapping and murder of innocent people. I may even he able to give them some ideas myself.’

Blade nodded and turned away, icy and impassive to the last.

‘You mean they’re just going to get away with it, Doctor?’ muttered Jamie. ‘Och, it doesna seem fair!’

‘It isn’t, Jamie. But we can’t undo the wrong they’ve done without their help. ‘The Doctor smiled wearily. ‘You don’t always achieve perfect justice, you know. Sometime you just have to do the best deal you can! Come on, or we’ll miss our plane!’

Later, very much later, when things were in a fair way to being sorted out again—when the kidnapped young people all over the world had been restored to their proper size and their proper place, and the Chameleons, formless once more, had disappeared into the blackness of space, and the Doctor and Jamie had had a joyous reunion with a dazed Polly and Ben, and Samantha Briggs and her brother had been re-united at last – when all these things had happened, the Doctor stood in Air Traffic Control saying goodbye to Jean Rock and the Commandant. Or rather, trying to, since both were desperately busy trying to get their Airport running smoothly again.

‘Well, thanks for everything,’ the Commandant was saying. The phone rang and he snatched it up. ‘I hope that’s not Brussels again.’

‘Just one thing,’ said the Doctor diffidently.

‘Yes? Hang on a moment Brussels.’

‘My, er, police box, said the Doctor. If I could have it back…’

‘Oh, yes, I see…’ The Commandant raised his voice.

‘Jean, find out where we finally put that police box and lend the Doctor and his friends my car to get there.

Anything to get the lot of them off my Airport... Now, then, Brussels... Hello, hello!’

Giving up, the Doctor waved goodbye to Jean Rock and went over to the door where Jamie and Samantha were waiting.

‘Goodbye, Samantha,’ said the Doctor. ‘Come on, Jamie, we’ve got to collect Polly and Ben, we’re getting a lift back to the TARDIS.’ He bustled away.

Jamie lingered for a moment in the doorway. ‘Well, goodbye, Samantha,’ he said awkwardly.

‘Oh, I’ll see you around, won’t I?’ she said brightly.

‘Around where?’

‘Well, around... You’re not just going off like that, are you?’

‘Aye, I must. Your brother’s coming to take you home, isn’t he?’

‘Yes.’ Samantha blinked. ‘Well, ta-ra, Jamie!’ She leaned forwards and gave him a kiss. ‘Thanks for everything.’

‘Bye,’ said Jamie and fled down the corridor after the Doctor. A little tearfully, Samantha watched him go.

The Commandant’s huge black limousine deposited the Doctor, Jamie, Polly and Ben by an outlying hangar and zoomed away. Getting his bearings, the Doctor strode off, disappearing round the corner of the hangar. ‘Doctor, where are you going?’ yelled Polly.

The Doctor reappeared. ‘Well, I was going back to the TARDIS, but –’

‘Couldn’t we stay in London for a while?’ pleaded Polly.

Ben nodded enthusiastically. ‘Yeah, why not? It’s good to feel normal again.’

The Doctor looked hurt. ‘Normal again? What do you mean, Ben?’

‘Well, you know, Doctor, no monsters, no Cyberman...’

He looked around. ‘All this is normal to me. I understand it.’

‘Do you, Ben? What about Chameleon Tours?’ asked the Doctor quizzically.

‘Oh, that was different!’

‘Come on,’ said Jamie. ‘What are we waiting for? I’ll be glad to get away from here. It’s a pity you canna control your TARDIS, Doctor, and get us back to a civilised time—like 1746!’

‘What’s so uncivilised about this age?’ asked Polly defensively.

‘1966’ scoffed Jamie. ‘You can keep it!’

Ben gaped at him. ‘Did you say 1966.’

‘Aye, I did!’

‘Are you sure? What day? What month?’

‘It’s July,’ said the Doctor, who had checked up before they left. ‘20th of July. 1966, to be precise.’

Polly looked puzzled. ‘What’s the matter, Ben?’

He grasped her hands. ‘Don’t you remember, Duchess?

20th of July, 1966 is when it all began! We’re back where it all started!’

Polly’s eyes widened. ‘That means we’ve never been away!’

‘What’s the time?’ asked Ben excitedly.

‘Five past three!’ said the Doctor, examining an old-fashioned time-piece which he took out of one of his voluminous pockets.

Ben was jumping up and down. ‘Then I’m not a deserter! I can get back to my ship!’

‘Yippeee!’ shouted Polly, her mind suddenly full of parties and pop concerts. ‘Swinging London, here I come!’

Suddenly she caught sight of the Doctor’s face and said,

‘Unless...’

The Doctor smiled a little sadly. ‘You really do want to stay, both of

you?' he asked.

'We won't leave if you really need us,' said Ben loyally.

'But you see we're back in our own time, our own world,' pleaded Polly.

'Yes, I know,' said the Doctor quietly. 'You're lucky, you know. I've never managed to get back to mine...'

Suddenly his face broke into a huge grin. 'Off you go then!'

'But Doctor,' said Polly. 'Are you sure?'

'What are you waiting for? Ben can catch his ship and become an Admiral... Keep an eye on him for me, won't you, Polly?'

There were tears in Polly's eyes. 'I will,' she promised and gave him a sudden bear-hug. 'Doctor, you *will* take care, won't you?'

'I'll look after him,' said Jamie gruffly.

'I'm sure you will, mate,' said Ben. 'Come on Duchess!'

He shook hands with Jamie and the Doctor and then he and Polly hurried away.

Jamie watched them walk off. 'I'm a wee bit sad to see them go, Doctor,' he admitted.

'So am I, Jamie, so am I!' The Doctor heaved a sigh.

'Well, come on, Jamie, we've got things to do.'

'What things?'

'Well, I didn't like to mention it to Polly and Ben in the circumstances, but we've lost the TARDIS!'

Jamie gaped at him. 'We havena!'

The Doctor led him around the corner of the hangar.

'That's where it's supposed to be – and it isn't there!'

'Do you mean someone's stolen it?'

'I don't know Jamie,' said the Doctor solemnly. 'But that's what we're

going to find out!'

The Doctor and Jamie walked away, towards what was to be one of their greatest adventures.

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